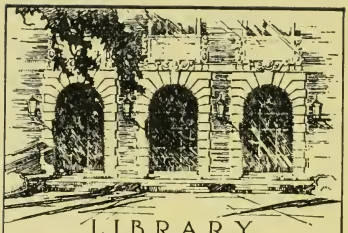

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LONDON: CHATTO & WINDUS, PICCADILLY, W.

TRUST-MONEY

A Novel

BY

WILLIAM WESTALL

AUTHOR OF
'THE OLD FACTORY,' 'RED RVVINGTON,' 'THE PHANTOM CITY,'
'TWO PINCHES OF SNUFF,' ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. I.

London

CHATTO & WINDUS, PICCADILLY

1892

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DEDICATION.

To

C. E. GREEN, Esq.,

FIELD-MASTER OF THE E. F. H.,

AND FOREMOST IN MANY A GALLANT CHASE,

This Story is Inscribed

BY

HIS FRIEND AND SOMETIMES FOLLOWER

THE AUTHOR.

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TRUST-MONEY

CHAPTER I.

MRS. PRINCE'S PRESENTIMENT.

The hall of an old-fashioned country-house. Background, a massive oaken staircase; on the walls, several handsomely-framed prints; and a trophy, composed of a fox's mask and half-a-dozen 'brushes' and stags' antlers arranged as a hat-stand. In the foreground vases filled with ferns and flowers.

The comely couple standing in the sunlight, which streams in through the doorway, are the master and mistress of the house, Leonard Prince and Dorothy, his wife. He is drawing on his gloves, she

putting a gardenia in his button-hole. Mrs. Prince is the stouter, albeit not the taller of the two, a matron of somewhat imposing presence, well favoured, with dark eyes and a fair skin. Mr. Prince, not having thickened with age like his spouse, looks younger than his years, which are far on in the fifties; his hair and mutton-chop whiskers are turning white, his comely face is bright with health and high spirits, and his keen gray eyes, strong white teeth and square jaws bespeak a vigorous constitution, a sanguine temperament, and an energetic character.

'Thank you very much, my dear,' says Mr. Prince, as his wife hands him his hat. 'I think I hear Tommy's step on the gravel. Come with me as far as the lodge gates.'

Mrs. Prince put on her garden hat, and the two went out together at the open door.

Tommy, Mr. Prince's hack, an old favourite, who knew his business so well that he always came to be mounted without

being led, was waiting for his master. Mrs. Prince stroked his neck, gave him a piece of sugar, and the three walked slowly down the avenue.

Mr. Prince cast a backward longing glance at the house, as though he were sorry to leave it, even for the day ; and well he might be, for it was a glorious morning, and Holmcroft, with its red brick walls, tiled roof, clustering ivy and rose-crowned porch, and in its fair setting of shrubberies and gardens, never looked more charming and picturesque.

'Yes, it is a dear, beautiful old place,' said Mrs. Prince, following her husband's eye and reading his thoughts. 'Yet what a wilderness it was when we first came here, nearly thirty years since !'

'So it was ; and since we were first married ; we have a great deal to be thankful for.'

'We have, indeed. God has been very good to us, and if we are permitted to end our days here——'

'If I had reason to fear we should not, I think it would break my heart.'

'And mine. However, we need not talk about ending our days. Neither of us is so very old yet. You are the youngest man of your years in the county, and Mr. Vayle was saying only the other day that you rode as straight as when you were thirty.'

'And you walk as straight, Dorothy. While, as for your looks——'

'No more, "an thou lovest me." You might suppose I was fishing for a compliment. Shall you be home late to-night?'

'No, Monday is generally an easy day at the office; and if there isn't much doing I mean to return early and do some jack fishing before dinner.'

'It seems rather a long time since we heard from Jack, doesn't it?'

Mr. Prince smiled; he was amused that his mention of jack fishing should remind his wife of their eldest son, but he answered gravely:

'Well, I don't know. It seems only the other day that you had a letter from him.'

'It is nearly three weeks since.'

'Dear me, how time flies! I suppose he has been too busy.'

'I am sure he has not been so busy that he could not find time to write to his mother. I hope he is not going wrong again, Leonard.'

'Why should you think so? Peploe speaks of him in the highest terms. He is very steady and regular, and is becoming quite an adept at underwriting, they say. They are quite willing to take him in as junior partner next year if I find two thou. I think by that time I shall be able to do it, with a little effort, and I don't see why I should not. They are a young firm, I know; but Peploe and Pope are both honourable and enterprising, and it is a chance not to be missed.'

'I hope Jack will prove himself worthy of it, but my mind misgives me.'

'Because he has not written to you for a fortnight?'

'Not that only, though it is a bad sign. In his letters lately there has been something that I cannot define, which has made me very uneasy. Moreover, in my last letter to him, written nearly three weeks ago, I put some very pointed questions, which he has not thought fit to answer—another bad sign. And you know how facile and impulsive he is; and he has gone wrong before. My fear is that he may be running into debt. He was always a spendthrift.'

'You are over-anxious, Dorothy. True, Jack has gone wrong before, as you say, and given us no end of trouble. But he has many redeeming qualities—he has never done anything dishonourable, or taken to drink; he is sharp and clever, too, and very affectionate. Moreover, for three years his conduct has been quite irreproachable; his employers speak well of him; and I think

we may safely conclude that he has sown his wild oats.'

'Well, I am perhaps mistaken. Let us say no more about it, and hope for the best, and if Jack had been like Ned and Charlie, we should have been almost too happy. One must have a cross, I suppose. Here we are at the lodge-gates. I shall expect you about four. Good-bye, dear.'

'Good-bye, dear,' echoed Mr. Prince, and then, after kissing his wife, rode off slowly and pensive.

'I hope I have not made Leonard unhappy with my croakings,' thought Mrs. Prince to herself, as she wended up the avenue. 'But I have had misgivings about Jack for some time, and I did no more than my duty in telling Leonard. It is not as if I had no warrant for my fears. I know Jack better than he does. His letters have not been sincere this month or more; and, if he could have answered my queries, he would have done so. Of that I am sure.

In spite of our exhortations, I fear—nay, I am almost sure—that he has been getting into debt. I will write again to-day and insist on an answer, and if it is not forthcoming his father shall go to Liverpool and see him.'

Meanwhile, Mr. Prince was mentally accusing his wife of being fidgety and too prone to look on the dark side of things.

'What if Jack has been wild?' he thought. 'Many a young fellow who has been wild turns out well. And if there were anything wrong, Peploe and Pope would be sure to let me know. All the same, he should answer his mother's letters, and when I get to the office I will write and tell him so.'

And then Mr. Prince, dismissing the subject from his mind and turning Tommy on the turfy side of the road, cantered gaily towards Peele.

Jack, their eldest son, had been a trouble to his parents from his youth upwards. In

addition to minor scrapes, he was expelled from a public school, and, after spending a term or two at Cambridge, ran off, worked his way in a sailing-ship to Australia, and a few years later returned to Holmcroft, penitent and ashamed. The experience did him good—his father thought it had worked a radical change in his character—and, after a few months' probation at home, Mr. Prince got the repentant prodigal a place with Peploe and Pope, a Liverpool firm of ship and insurance brokers, where the knowledge of shipping and commerce which he had gained on his voyages and at Melbourne stood him in good stead, and being bright and intelligent withal, and having that capacity for making friends so common with most scrapegraces, he was not long in winning the confidence of his employers and obtaining a leading position in their office.

His father, though greatly disappointed (he had intended him for the Bar), laid the flattering unction to his soul that Jack was

on the high road to fortune, and would give him no more trouble—an opinion, however, in which, as we have seen, his wife did not share.

Of their two other sons, Edward, the elder, is rounding off his legal education in the office of his father's London agent, and Charlie, in the intervals of shooting, fishing, and hunting, is serving his articles in the paternal establishment.

As Mr. Prince rides up the High Street of Peele, which straggles over a low hill, topped by the ruins of an ancient castle, he is greeted by all and sundry. Common folks touch their hats to him, others nod familiarly and say, 'Good-morning, Mr. Prince.' For the master of Holmcroft is the most popular and influential man in the town—leading solicitor, Clerk of the Peace, clerk to the Justices and Board of Guardians, and agent to Lord Hermitage, the largest landowner in those parts. He has been several times mayor, and no candidate for the

suffrages of the 'free and independent' burgesses of the borough whom he does not support has much chance of becoming its representative in Parliament.

His friend, Mr. Lincoln (of the great American firm of Lyman, Lincoln, and Jump), who has a country seat in the neighbourhood, calls him 'the Boss of Peele.'

He is, moreover, supposed to be well off—keeps a stud of hunters, lives in good style, and gives liberally to local charities. His legal business is of the lucrative sort so much desired by solicitors—mainly conveyancing; he is the trusted adviser of all the squires and farmers in the country-side, and, save in litigious cases, never had a bill taxed in his life, nor has he ever consented to take up an unclean case or accept a disreputable client.

Mr. Prince reins up before an old-fashioned house in the High Street, throws his right leg over his horse's withers, and drops lightly on the pavement. On this

Tommy goes off to his stable, and his master walks briskly into his office, the old-fashioned house aforesaid. The brass plate on the door bears the inscription :

'Prince and Prince, Solicitors.'

The Princes in question were Mr. Leonard Prince's father and uncle, to whose business he succeeded many years previously. They have been long dead, but he likes to keep up the old style, the more especially as he has good reason to believe that his sons will succeed him in turn, and the firm become in reality as in name, 'Prince and Prince' once more.

After looking in at the general office and the estate office, and seeing that all the clerks are at work, and bidding them good-morning, Mr. Prince enters his own room, where he is presently joined by Mr. Lillywhite, his managing clerk.

A queer-looking gentleman was Mr. Lillywhite. People said he had the longest head

in all Peele. He had certainly the biggest nose, and it was the only part of his face which blushed or otherwise showed emotion, the rest of his visage being as sallow and expressionless as a piece of his own parchment. The nose, however, was all expression. It moved when he talked, wobbled when he laughed, and trembled when he swore. Its hue changed with the days of the week. On a Monday morning it was terra-cotta red; by Wednesday it toned down to light purple; on Saturday it was generally light blue. These remarkable variations were conceivably due to the fact that Mr. Lillywhite made a rule of drinking a bottle of old port with his Sunday dinner, and with his other dinners only beer. The managing clerk was further distinguished by the length of his body, and the phenomenal bareness of his face and head, the only hair of which he could boast being a single yellow tuft on the top of his cranium, which he humorously called his scalp lock.

'Anything new this morning, Lillywhite?' asked Mr. Prince as he opened his letters.

'Nothing particular; Mr. Juniper called. He wants another will making.'

'The deuce he does! Why, that will be the second this year, won't it?'

'The third. He is a good man, Mr. Juniper, always thinking about his latter end. However, it amuses him and pays us. This is a free country, and a man has a right to make as many wills as he likes.'

'Well, prepare the draft, and let him have it at once. Has anyone else called?'

'A gentleman, who seemed rather anxious to see you. He was here when I came. Said he would call again shortly, but refused to give his name.'

'A stranger, then?'

'He must be; I never saw him before.'

'Probably a commercial traveller, who wants us to recover a debt for his house.'

'I don't think so. He does not look like

one. Besides, in that case he would have told me his business. Shall I send him in to you if he comes again?'

'By all means.'

'Well, I think I'll go and prepare this draft. It will be little more than a copy of the previous will, with a few variations.'

Whereupon Mr. Lillywhite withdrew; but the door had hardly closed behind him when he was back again.

'Here he is, Mr. Prince,' he whispered. 'Just come in at the front door. . . . This way, sir. Mr. Prince has arrived.'

And then there entered a tall, red-haired gentleman in a tweed travelling suit, closely followed by the managing clerk.

'God bless me, Mr. Peploe!' exclaimed Mr. Prince, rising from his chair with a look of blank surprise. 'How are you?'

'As well as can be expected, thank you, seeing that I have been travelling all night. Could I have a word with you, Mr. Prince?' glancing at Lillywhite.

The head clerk took the hint, and withdrew a second time.

'Peploe, Peploe,' he murmured, 'Peploe and Pope, one of Jack's masters. What's up now, I wonder?'

'Pray take a seat, Mr. Peploe,' said Mr. Prince seriously, for he thought of his wife and feared that this visit boded no good. Peploe was a busy man. It was no light cause that brought him all the way from Liverpool to Peele. 'How did you leave Jack?'

'I did not leave him at all. He left us.'

'Left you? How, Mr. Peploe?'

'In the lurch. You will excuse my bluntness, Mr. Prince. But I have neither time nor inclination just now to beat about the bush. I must come to the point at once. Your son has robbed us—that is why I am here to-day.'

Mr. Prince turned as white as a sheet, and fell back in his chair as though he had been struck.

'Robbed you! No, no, Mr. Peploe! That is impossible. Jack may have been a little wild and extravagant, perhaps; but not dishonest. Don't say he has been dishonest.'

'I wish to God he had not. But there, see for yourself.'

CHAPTER II.

PEPLOE'S PROPOSAL.

Mr. Peploe took from his pocket-book two documents, and laid them on Mr. Prince's desk.

One was a wildly incoherent letter from Jack, in which, with many expressions of contrition, the writer acknowledged having abused his employers' confidence and 'taken' a large sum of money—lost on the Stock Exchange and betting: he must have been mad, but he would pay them back every penny, so help him God! he would. He ended by begging them to say nothing to his father.

The other document was to the following effect:

'Private and Confidential.

'Messrs. Peploe and Pope.

'Dear Sirs,—I have gone through your books, and find that the defalcations directly traceable to Mr. John Prince amount to the sum of £19,450 17s. 6d.—Yours truly,

'Henry Tanner, Accountant.'

Mr. Prince gazed at these letters like one fascinated, and his hand trembled so that he could scarcely hold them. He knew from the first that Peploe was the bearer of bad news, but the reality surpassed his worst forebodings. His eldest son a felon and a fugitive from justice! He would rather have heard that Jack had died by his own hand. Yet, even in that moment of unspeakable mental anguish, Leonard Prince's first thought was of his wife. What would she say? How would she bear it? How should he tell her? he asked himself.

'But you—how?' he said at length, in a husky voice.

'I know what you mean,' answered Mr. Peploe. 'You mean, how came we to let him rob us to the tune of nearly twenty thousand pounds? Well, we were fools; there is no doubt about that. People are fools sometimes. But he got on the blind side of us, that's a fact. And it never occurred to us that such a bright, seemingly straightforward young fellow, so respectably connected, too, could be otherwise than honest. The worst of it is that it is not our money he has taken.'

'Not your own money?'

'No; it is clients' money. You know the nature of our business. We underwrite the names of a number of friends to policies, and the accumulated premiums form a fund for the payment of losses. If the premiums exceed the losses, the profit goes to the underwriters, less our commission; if the losses exceed the premiums, the underwriters have

to make up the difference. We have the handling of the money, which we invest on the best terms we can obtain, compatible with good security. Latterly this branch of the business has been managed by your son, under our directions. I am afraid, though, we did not look as sharply after him as we should have done. But, as I said just now, we never thought that a man so respectably connected, and of whom we thought so highly that we were going to take him into partnership, would go wrong. He was so diligent, too, and regular in his attendance at the office—would not even take a holiday. I know why now. If he had, he would have been found out. Well, last Saturday he went yachting with some friends, and intended to be back on Sunday night or Monday morning; but the yacht got into trouble off the Welsh coast, and Prince did not turn up at the office on Monday. Now, it so happened that on the same day I received notice of several claims;

also I heard that a steamer in which we were rather largely interested had come to grief in the Channel. Knowing we should want money, and a lot of it—when claims are concerned, it never rains but it pours—I called at a bank where we had, or rather should have had, ten thousand pounds on deposit, and gave notice of withdrawal. I was told that nearly half of it had already been withdrawn in various amounts and at intervals extending over several weeks. Though surprised, I was not alarmed. I merely thought that Prince had changed the investment for some good reason, and blamed him only for not informing me. But when I found that the books contained no entry of the withdrawals, the possibility of something being wrong dawned on my mind. As the day went on, my uneasiness increased ; and as soon as I could get away from the office, I called at your son's lodgings. He had not returned. In the course of the evening I called three times,

always with the same result. When I called again next morning, I learned that he did not return till midnight, and must have left shortly afterwards. At any rate, he had not been in bed. My visits had alarmed him ; perhaps, also, he had heard of the loss of the *Cyclops*, and knew that, in view of our financial requirements, his frauds could no longer be concealed. Anyhow, I have not seen him since last Saturday. That note came by post.'

'The wretched, misguided boy!' groaned Mr. Prince. 'Have you any idea where he is?'

'Well, I am afraid I could not give you his correct address at this moment. But I don't doubt that, if I tried, I could lay my hands on him.'

In saying this, Mr. Peploe went rather beyond the mark. He had not the faintest idea what was become of Jack, but it did not just then suit his purpose to say so.

'Do you propose to prosecute?' asked

Mr. Prince in a voice which showed how much the effort cost him.

'Well, that depends on circumstances. We might, you know. Your son has behaved shamefully, there is no doubt about that. We trusted him, and he has betrayed us. All the same, we have no wish to go to extremities, and if we could be met——'

'If you could be met! Pray be explicit, Mr. Peploe,' said Mr. Prince, looking as if he had no idea what the other was driving at, though he knew only too well.

'Explicit! Oh yes, I will be explicit. It is very easy to be explicit in an affair of this sort. As I remarked just now, we have no desire to prosecute. But unless we can have fifteen thousand pounds within the next four days—say by next Tuesday, at the latest—we must pull up, and then everything will be exposed, and we shall be forced to hunt your son down and prosecute him, if only for our own justification; and as it is a case of forgery as well as em-

bezzlement, we can fetch him back from America, or anywhere else—if he goes out of the country.'

'Forgery! Good heavens!'

'Yes, it is mostly embezzlement; but there are one or two undoubted cases of forgery. It would be a terrible scandal for all of us. But if we can be met, nobody need be the wiser. Tanner is sworn to secrecy, so to speak; and you may be sure we won't split. If this got wind we should lose half our underwriters, and our credit would be ruined. Can you find us fifteen thousand pounds between this and next Tuesday, Mr. Prince? I am not in a position to make any promises about paying you back—we shall have to lose nearly five thousand ourselves, and we are only a young firm—but we would try to pay you a moderate interest. What do you say, Mr. Prince—will you do it?'

'It is not a question of will, Mr. Peploe. I am grieved beyond measure; I am un-

speakably humiliated that a son of mine should have done you this wrong. It adds to my grief that his wrongdoing may entail your ruin, but I cannot do what you wish.'

Peploe's saturnine face flushed with anger and disappointment.

'That means you won't,' he exclaimed angrily. 'I know fifteen thousand is a big lump. But just consider the consequences of your refusal. Our ruin is a minor consideration. We should have looked better after our business, I admit; but, having regard to the circumstances, I don't think the creditors will be very hard on us. They will let us make a fresh start. But think of your son in a felon's dock—he is sure to get ten years at least—think of the scandal it will cause! You are a great man here, I am told. How will you look your townsmen in the face when they know that your eldest son——'

'Mind what you say, sir, or——' exclaimed Mr. Prince, springing from his chair

as though he were minded to resent the insult with a blow, or show the insulter to the door.

Then he sank down and bowed his head. The man had only spoken the truth.

'You feel it keenly. I knew you would. What father would not?' returned Peploe soothingly. 'All the more reason for letting us have this money. It will be well laid out, and we are asking nothing unreasonable; we will pay you interest. My partner said to me the last thing before I came away, "Be sure," he said, "you don't ask the old gentleman anything unreasonable, Sam. It is not hush-money we want, only help."'

Mr. Prince winced. He prided himself on the comparative youthfulness of his appearance, and it went against the grain to know that these Liverpool people spoke of him as 'the old gentleman.'

'Reasonable or unreasonable, I am unable to do it, Mr. Peploe,' he returned sharply. 'I don't say I would not if I could. But

as I unfortunately don't happen to have fifteen thousand pounds in my pocket or at my banker's——'

'I did not suppose you had, Mr. Prince. But there are ways and means. A gentleman in your position could easily raise as much. Anyhow, I should think so.'

'Not in four or five days?'

'We might perhaps make it seven.'

'Nor in seven, nor in fourteen days.'

'In that case there is nothing more to be said,' observed Peploe, rising from his chair. 'Things must take their course, I suppose.'

Mr. Prince made no answer. It seemed useless to prolong the interview, and he wanted Peploe to go. He was beginning to hate the man, and he wanted to be alone.

'Things must take their course, I suppose,' repeated the persistent Liverpudlian. 'But perhaps you may think better of it, after all. And if you do—if you see your way, you know—you will, perhaps, be good

enough to telegraph to our office in Liverpool. We won't take any action before Friday, but the sooner the better. One word will do—"Arranged." We shall understand.'

'I can hold out no encouragement, Mr. Peploe; none whatever. Nevertheless, if I should see my way, I will telegraph, as you say.'

Peploe's countenance brightened. Like drowning men, the financially embarrassed catch at straws, and though, fairly considered, the lawyer's concluding observation offered little ground for hope, Peploe went away comforted, and little doubting that, on his arrival at Liverpool, he should find awaiting him the telegram whose despatch he had suggested.

When the door closed behind his visitor, Mr. Prince leaned back in his chair and wiped the perspiration from his brow. He had undergone the most painful experience of his life, and there was worse in store.

How should he break the news to his wife? If he could spare her, he would. But it was impossible. Know she must. In a week the secret would be out. For though he had not liked to say so in express terms, it was as much out of his power to find fifteen thousand pounds in four days—or four months—as to find fifty thousand. Contrary to the general belief, a belief which he rather encouraged, Mr. Prince was not rich. He had a good income, and he lived up to it. Beyond the two or three thousand pounds which he employed in his business for temporary advances to his clients, and so forth, and which he could neither well spare nor immediately realize, he had very little laid by. He had always looked on his business as an estate, which he could bequeath to his sons as his father had bequeathed it to him. His wife was provided for by a marriage settlement and a policy of insurance on his life. He had not thought it necessary to economize, and,

though not a thriftless man, it gave him less pleasure to accumulate than to spend. But now he bitterly regretted that he had not been more provident, for he would gladly have paid twice, nay, thrice fifteen thousand pounds, to avert the disaster with which he was threatened.

Only a few days, and, as Peploe said, he would be unable to look his neighbours in the face. The hue and cry after Jack, the story of his defalcations told in every paper in the land, the trial and sentence (for he was sure to be taken), the consternation of friends, the exultation of the envious, the joy of political opponents—all this was torture even in the thought. What would it be in reality ?

Moreover, the scandal could hardly fail to injure his business and imperil his position, and Mr. Prince valued his position hardly less than he valued his life. Better leave Peele altogether. And yet leaving Peele would be the end of the world. There was

no other spot in it where for him and his life would be worth living.

A knock at the door.

'Come in,' said Mr. Prince, taking a paper at random from the pile before him.

When Mr. Lillywhite entered the room, his principal was deep in the perusal of counsel's opinion in the matter of 'Towzler *v.* Towzler and another.'

'Oh, Mr. Peploe is gone, then?' said the managing clerk, with well-affected surprise, for he had heard Peploe's departing footsteps.

'Yes, he is gone. What is it? Anything new?'

'Only that Hutchins wants ten or twelve thousand pounds on the security of his Tanfield property. It is worth half as much again, and as he will pay five per cent. and execute a mortgage for five years, I thought it would be an excellent investment for some of Mrs. Lincoln's trust-money.'

'Mrs. Lincoln's money is very well where

it is. You cannot beat Consols for safety, and one or two per cent. makes no difference to her.'

'That is true. All the same, the transfer would make good business for the office. Hutchins would stand a procuration fee, and investigating the title and drawing the mortgage and what not would make a nice penny.'

'Right you are, Lillywhite; you have always an eye to the main chance. If I had not you to look after details, it would not be the office it is by a long way. Yes, the transfer would make something nice, and lawyers live on costs, I have heard say.'

'Two hundred pounds at the very least.'

'All the same, you must bear in mind, my dear Lillywhite, that now Wilmot is dead I am Mrs. Lincoln's sole trustee, and must take the whole responsibility; and really, you know, I hardly like to change the investment merely to oblige old

Hutchins and put money in my own pocket.'

'It won't be merely to put money in your own pocket. It will put money into Mrs. Lincoln's pocket, to the tune of a hundred and thirty or forty pounds a year.'

'The Lincolns are so rich, Lillywhite, that they think less of a hundred pounds than I do of six-and-eightpence; and I have no doubt that if I were to mention it to Mrs. Lincoln she would say, "Leave the money where it is." A trustee cannot be too particular, and my position is all the more delicate in that I am both her trustee and her solicitor; and so long as I keep the money where it was from the first, nobody can blame me. However, I will think about it, and look at the trust-deed again before deciding. I have not read it for years, and it rather runs in my mind that I am restricted to Consols.'

'Tanfield Farm is quite as safe, Mr. Prince.'

'Perhaps. Anyhow, I am not going to infringe the trusts of the settlement either to make business for the office or to oblige Mr. Hutchins. I suppose it will do if he gets his answer next week?'

'Oh yes. He is in no hurry; and if we don't find him the money he can easily get it elsewhere. Anything else, sir?'

'I think not;' and Mr. Prince turned again to the paper before him.

Lillywhite took this as a sign of dismissal, and went away greatly dissatisfied that he had failed to find out the cause of Peploe's visit, and the nature of his business. He liked to know, and flattered himself that he did know, everything that went on in the office, and a good deal that went on outside. There were no end of secrets locked up in that long head of his; never before had his employer kept anything from him; and considering his position in the office, and his many years' faithful service, he felt that he was being badly used.

What did it all mean? Why had Peploe come all the way from Liverpool? What had passed during his long interview with the governor, and, above all, why was the governor so close? For years there had not been a difficult or delicate case in the office as to which Mr. Prince had not consulted him, and, as often as not, taken his advice.

'Well, if he won't tell me, I must find it out for myself,' he thought. 'I must find it out, and it is a queer case that Andrew Lillywhite cannot bottom.'

CHAPTER III.

SOWING THE WIND.

During the remainder of the day Mr. Prince had little leisure for thought. Several important clients called; he was sent for to the Town Hall; the second post brought him letters which required immediate attention; and when he mounted his nag for the ride home, the clock of St. Dunstan was chiming six.

It was a fine evening; the park-like country before him, with its sparkling meads, silvery streams, and hedgerows white with hawthorn, looked exquisitely beautiful. Spring had cast her magic spell over the land; larks were carolling joyously in the upper air, and the red sun was dipping

slowly towards the empurpled shades of the distant forest.

But all these sights and sounds, all this glow of nature, were lost on Leonard Prince. There was no sunshine in his heart ; it was heavy with grief and pain. For the first time in his life he was battling in deep waters. Never before had he gone home reluctantly, never before looked forward to meeting his wife with apprehension and fear.

For the hundredth time he asked himself how he should tell her the evil news, tell her that their eldest son was a forger, a thief, and a fugitive from justice, and that in a few days his shame and their own would be published on the housetops. And how would she bear it—she who was more sensitive on the point of honour than himself, whose pride was greater even than his own, and who had lavished so much love and tenderness on this unworthy boy ?

' It has to be faced,' he murmured ; ' the sooner I get it over the better.'

So soon as he was clear of the town he touched Tommy with his heel, and the gallant little horse stepped out to such purpose that in less than twenty minutes he was at the Holmcroft lodge-gates.

As Mr. Prince pulled up at the hall-door his wife crossed the lawn with a bunch of freshly-gathered flowers in her hand.

'How about the fishing?' she said, smiling pleasantly. 'I thought you were coming home early to try for some jack?'

'Fishing? Well, do you know, I forgot all about it—I have not thought of it since.'

'You have been busy, then?'

'All day; every minute occupied. Had to see the Mayor and the Watch Committee about an impending lawsuit; long conference with Thornwood touching that disputed water-right, and I don't know what besides.'

'You look fagged, and your eyes are

troubled. You are more than fagged; you are worried. What is it, Leonard? Nothing has gone wrong, I hope.'

'Yes, Dorothy, something has gone very wrong. But come into my room, dear; we can talk there more at our ease, and without being observed or overheard.'

He led the way, and she followed him in silent surprise. The style and furnishing of Mr. Prince's room were in harmony with its owner's tastes and pursuits. On the writing-table law-papers neatly tied and docketed; on the walls trophies of the chase and engravings of famous horses and scenes in the hunting-field; fishing-rods in one corner, a gun-rack in another.

Mr. Prince drew up a chair for his wife, then seated himself by her side and took her hand.

All this preparation and the gravity of her husband's manner naturally alarmed Mrs. Prince.

'Good heavens, Leonard!' she gasped.

'What is it? The boys! Has—are they well? Tell me quickly!'

'I believe so. I have heard nothing to the contrary. But there are worse things than not being well. You have high courage, and you will need it.'

Mrs. Prince drew a deep breath.

'Go on, please. Don't keep me in suspense. I can bear anything but that.'

'You remember what you said this morning about Jack—that you feared he was going wrong! I did not share in your fears. But you were right. He has gone wrong, fearfully wrong——'

'Oh, Leonard! What has he done?'

'Robbed his employers of nearly twenty thousand pounds and absconded.'

Mrs. Prince neither exclaimed nor turned pale; she looked dazed and bewildered, as though the stroke had stunned her, and she was unable to grasp the full significance of her husband's words. Then, drawing a long breath, she put her hands before her eyes

and remained silent several minutes. Mr. Prince, who had expected a scene, watched her anxiously.

'Did you understand, Dorothy?' he said at length, again taking her hand.

'Oh yes, I understood perfectly. This boy of ours—the first I bore you, Leonard—this boy, by whom we set such store, whom we have helped so generously and forgiven so often, has played the thief, and will engulf us in his own ruin. Is this all, Leonard?'

'All, Dorothy! Good God! what would you have? Yes, it is all.'

'He has not been arrested?'

'Not yet.'

'You think he will be, then?'

'I am sure. Peploe says that unless I can find fifteen thousand pounds within the next five or six days they will put the police on his track, and if they do the odds are a thousand to one against his escape.'

'Tell me all about it.'

Mr. Prince told her of Peploe's visit and his demand.

'The money must be found, Leonard.'

'Must! must!' he said bitterly. 'It is easy to say "must." But how—tell me how? You know that I have not fifteen thousand pounds in the world, or anything like it.'

'Cannot you borrow it?'

'No. What security can I offer? The bank would let me have two or three thousand, I dare say, but that would be of no more use than two or three hundred. These people want fifteen thousand by next Friday, at the latest.'

'Mr. Lincoln?'

'I doubt whether Mr. Lincoln would lend me a thousand pounds, rich as he is, and he starts for Liverpool to-morrow morning, *en route* for New York. I don't see how I could raise the money, though I had a respite of six months instead of six days. It cannot be done. I wish it could.'

'It shall be done. It must be done. . . .

Have I been a good wife to you, Leonard Prince ?'

'Why do you ask so strange a question, Dorothy ? You know that I love the very ground you tread on.'

'Have I been a good mother to your children ?'

'Ask them—even Jack. But why——'

'Well, I would rather give up my life, I would rather follow you to the grave, I would rather see Jack lying dead at my feet, than that this disgrace should befall us ! Do you realize the horror of it ?'

'To the full. A great misfortune has come upon us, and we are threatened with a disaster which I see no way of averting.'

Mrs. Prince wrung her hands, and her white lips twisted convulsively.

'It must be averted ! There is a way !' she exclaimed wildly. 'You are a man of business. I would do anything—anything ! If you love me, think of something ; for if

the worst happens, I shall either die or go mad !'

He leaned his head on his hand, made a desperate effort to compose himself and obey his wife's injunction to ' think of something.'

When he looked up she placed her hand on his shoulder.

' You have thought of something,' she said eagerly. ' What is it ?'

It was a terrible moment for Leonard Prince. He had inherited from his father a healthy body and a sane mind, and a nature so happily organized that it cost him no effort to do right. And he had always been denominated by a desire to do right. Never in his life had he paltered with his honour or abused the confidence of a client, nor was there any class of men for whom he had so great a contempt as chicaning lawyers and defaulting trustees. He was a strong man, too, with a clear head and a rare capacity for facing and overcoming difficulties.

But there was a weak point in his armour —he loved his wife with hardly less ardour than when they were first wed—and though she was the weaker of the two, love gave her a power over him which he was unable to withstand. Left to himself, or less passionately entreated, he would never have thought of so fatal an expedient as that which had occurred to him. He would have braved the storm and lived down the scandal which the revelation of his son's misconduct would have caused. But with that pale, drawn face before him, with those dear beseeching eyes raised to his in agonized suspense, what could he do, how help himself?

'You have thought of something,' she repeated. 'What is it? Tell me, Leonard. Tell me at once.'

'I have thought of something, only——'

'What?'

'It would not be right.'

'But what is it?'

Again Mr. Prince hesitated, and then slowly, and almost in a whisper, as though he feared the walls might hear him, he answered :

'It is this. I am the sole surviving trustee under Mrs. Lincoln's marriage settlement. The entire fund, fifteen thousand pounds, is invested in Consols. It stands in my name, and I could turn it into cash within twenty-four hours.'

'Thank God! Oh, Leonard, why did not you tell me this sooner? It would have saved me—words cannot tell the agony it would have saved me.'

'Because I did not think of it sooner. Remember this is not my money, Dorothy.'

'I am sure Mrs. Lincoln would lend it you.'

'She has no power to lend it. The corpus, the principle, cannot be dealt with till she is dead and her youngest child is twenty-one. Remember, too, that my position is very peculiar. I am both her solicitor

and her trustee. When Wilmot died she might have appointed another in his place. But she put so much trust in me that she would not. It is owing to her generous, her excessive confidence that I have the sole control of the fund, and if I were to use it for my own purposes what would she think of me? what should I think of myself?'

'I would not wrong Mrs. Lincoln for the world. We should pay her back every shilling,' broke in Mrs. Prince impetuously —'every shilling. And though it is a little irregular, consider the alternative.'

'I have considered the alternative; and as for reinstating the fund, that would not be so easy as you think. Fifteen thousand is a great deal of money.'

'We will economize. We can save several hundreds a year without perceptibly altering our style of living. Edward is keeping himself. There is only Charlie on our hands, and with care and good manage-

ment we can make the amount up in a few years.'

'You forget one thing, Dorothy. We are all mortal, and if anything should happen to me—you and the boys would be in a terrible difficulty. Mrs. Lincoln would then be obliged to appoint another trustee, and exposure and disgrace would be inevitable. You would have to confess that I had misappropriated the trust fund. Everything would come out.'

If Mr. Prince thought that this argument would induce his wife to renounce the scheme which he had so unfortunately suggested he was mistaken.

'You might insure your life, and then Mrs. Lincoln would be safe in any event,' she said after a short pause. 'You will do it, Leonard, won't you? Say you will do it and relieve me from this dreadful suspense. It is to save the family honour. Where should we hide our heads if it were all made known, and Jack put on his trial? You

said only this morning that it would break your heart to leave Holmcroft. For my sake and Edward's and Charlie's, if not for your own, you will do it, dear. And Jack himself, he is our own boy, after all, and dear to me still. Think of his undergoing a term of penal servitude! It would be his ruin, here and hereafter. Oh, think of it! Why should you hesitate? While you live the money will be at your disposal, and when you die it will be paid by the insurance—unless we save it in the meantime—and I feel sure you will live so long that we shall. You are not an old man yet. You will, won't you, dear?' And she took both his hands in hers, and looked at him pitifully with tear-filled eyes.

'Adam and Eve over again,' thought Mr. Prince. 'But it is my own fault; I gave her the idea.'

'Very well, Dorothy; it shall be as you wish,' he said sadly. 'I only hope the remedy won't prove worse than the disease.'

'I am sure it won't, Leonard. Thank Heaven! I can breathe now. I should have gone mad. You will insure your life?'

'My own life and the lads' lives. They are to be my partners, and it is a common thing for partners to insure each other's lives. It will add to the value of the security. In that way Mrs. Lincoln will, as you said, be practically as safe as if the money remained in Consols, provided, of course, I keep up the payment of the premiums, and that I must and can do, though it will come very heavy. I shall try to make Peploe and Pope pay five per cent., even if they never repay the principal —and, yes, I will give up my shooting in Scotland. I can easily say that I have not time for both that and hunting. It is irregular—very irregular; there is no denying that—but the emergency is a desperate one, and if Mrs. Lincoln does not suffer—and with the arrangements I shall make I

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don't see how she can—we shall have nothing much to reproach ourselves with.'

This was rather an expression of hope than of conviction. Mr. Prince knew that if anybody else had done what he was proposing to do he should have characterized the proceeding by a very ugly word, and though he was trying to make the best of it, and to make believe that no harm could come of it, he had an uneasy feeling that harm would come of it in some way not then apparent either to himself or his wife. She, however, had no misgivings. Albeit so honest that she would not have plucked a flower in Mrs. Lincoln's garden without asking permission, it did not seem to her that in urging her husband to take that lady's money and use it for his own purpose, without her knowledge, she had done anything reprehensible. Leonard was merely borrowing it, she argued ; the measures he was taking would ensure its eventual repayment, and all would be well.

'When will you send the money to Liverpool?' she asked.

'I shall not send it—I shall take it. I must have a thorough understanding with Messrs. Peploe and Pope, and, if possible, get some security from them before I part with any money.'

'But suppose they have Jack arrested before you get there?'

'I shall telegraph them in the morning that I am coming.'

'I wonder what has become of him, Leonard? Where can he be?'

'That does not concern me at present. I only hope he is far enough, and that we may hear nothing of him again for a long time—if ever.'

'Oh, Leonard! You hope never to hear of Jack again! Why?'

'Because we are not likely to hear any good of him. When a man goes so utterly to the bad as he has done, he is generally past praying for. Before this last affair I

had more faith in him than you had ; now I have none whatever. The best thing for him to do, though I doubt whether he will have the sense and resolution to do it, is to go to America or one of the colonies, begin a new career, earn an honest livelihood, and stay there until his misdeeds are forgotten. I hope it won't turn out that he has victimized other people besides Peploe and Pope.'

'God forbid, Leonard ! Why should you think so ?'

'Because a man who is capable of robbing his employers and deceiving his parents is capable of anything. It is one of the points I must inquire about when I am at Liverpool.'

'Will you tell the boys ?'

'Not Charlie — except that Jack has behaved badly and gone away, we know not whither, and the less that is said about him the better. But Edward must know all.'

'Why Edward and not Charlie ?'

'There is no need to lay on the lad's shoulders so heavy a burden. Let him enjoy his life while he is young. But either Edward or Lillywhite must know, and, faithful though Lillywhite is, I don't want to put myself in his power. I shall have to deal with Peploe and Pope on the one hand, and Mrs. Lincoln on the other. Her dividends will have to be paid just as if the trust fund were still invested in Consols; the interest from Peploe and Pope will have to be collected as may be arranged, and the insurance premiums regularly paid. All this must be done without hitch, and unknown to everybody in the office but ourselves. It is only by taking Edward into my confidence that I can make sure that in the event of my illness or absence there will be no difficulty; a hitch might be fatal. And Ned has an old head on young shoulders.'

'Yes, Edward is very good. But all this is very, very sad. Oh, Leonard,' said Mrs.

Prince, sighing deeply, 'shall we ever know content again?'

'We may. Anyhow, I know people who have very ugly skeletons in their cupboards, and yet laugh and joke, dine with appetite, and ride as merrily to hounds as though they had nothing on their minds. Use is second nature, they say; and we shall perhaps get so used to our particular skeleton that its presence in the cupboard won't trouble us—very much.'

This assurance, though it may have answered its intended purpose of comforting Mrs. Prince, neither allayed her husband's apprehensions nor quieted his conscience. No amount of sophistry could reconcile his trained intelligence and essentially upright mind to the gross breach of trust which he contemplated, or render him oblivious to the fact that he was about to lay on his soul a burden of which only death could relieve him. But the alternative! A broken-hearted wife, a frightful scandal, and a con-

victt son, had even greater terrors, and he chose, as he thought, the lesser evil.

On the following day, after telling Lillywhite that he had decided to decline Hutchins's proposed mortgage, Mr. Prince went to London, and thence to Liverpool, where he arranged matters with Peploe and Pope as satisfactorily as so bad a business could be arranged. Shortly afterwards, however, what he had feared came to pass. It was discovered that Jack had not confined his depredations to his employers. He had discounted a forged bill with his private bankers. But, as there was reason to believe that he had left the country for parts unknown, the bankers decided not to throw good money after bad by trying to hunt him down. Nevertheless, they were very wroth, declined an offer from Mr. Prince to make the amount good, and intimated that in the event of the culprit returning to England they should consider it their duty to prosecute him.

But none of these things oozed out at Peele. The people of that rather sleepy old town were quite satisfied with the only explanation which the Princes vouchsafed to them—that Jack, having got into debt and lost his billet at Liverpool, had betaken himself to America, there to make a fresh start.

CHAPTER IV.

THE BROTHERS.

One of the last days of October; a still air and a dappled sky; a veil of silver mist mellowing yet not obscuring the sunlight; two horsemen riding along a deep lane overshadowed by trees, from whose half-nude branches russet-coloured leaves, heavy with dew, are falling noiselessly to their mother earth.

The two men wear costumes suitable either for road or field—breeches, leggings, gray coats, and felt hats; one has spurs, but no hunting crop; the other a hunting crop, but no spurs.

The rider with spurs is three or four years under thirty, tall, slightly built,

swarthy, and clean-shaven. He has dark, intelligent eyes and good looks, but his skin is sallow, his face that of a man who does not live much in the open air.

His companion, younger by several years, and not quite so tall, has laughing brown eyes, brown hair, and a brown face, to which a silky moustache with naturally-curled points gives a somewhat rakish, devil-may-care air.

This young fellow is Charlie Prince; the other, Edward, generally called Ned by his family and familiar friends.

'Do you expect any sport to-day?' asks the elder brother.

'Not much; but we shall, at any rate, have the pleasure of riding about in the forest, which is never so beautiful as at this time. I would rather go with the fox-hounds, of course; but regular hunting has not begun yet, and this week's cubbing fixtures are all long ones. You can never tell what may happen with Mr. Vayle's

harriers. This would be a good scenting day, and if we have the luck to find a straight-running fox——'

'A fox!'

'Why not? The fox-hounds always fight shy of the forest—if they once get in they never get out—and if the harriers chance to rouse a long-tail they will do good service by running him. Last season we found a fox in Silverwood Spinny, ran him——'

'Spare me, Charlie!' interrupted Edward with a laugh. 'It is a thrice-told tale. The day we dined at Cherrytree Hall that run was discussed a full hour by the clock. And do not imagine that I am pining for an heroic run. I am not a keen sportsman like you and father; and I have ridden so little lately that I should be all abrasions. I shall be quite content with a little gentle tittuping through the rides, or a canter across Thornwood Plain—if by good fortune we get into the open—and whatever hap-

pens I shall leave off in good time. I must do two or three hours' work at the office before dinner; and to-morrow I may have to go to town.'

'*In re* Lyman, Lincoln, and Jump?'

'Of course!'

'I say, what a fine pot-boiler that case is proving for the office! It would almost keep us going, though there was nothing else. Is there any likelihood of its being settled, do you think?'

'Not the least, I should say. There is a big estate; the partners and Mrs. Lincoln are all at sixes and sevens, and you may be sure the lawyers won't let them settle until they have had a lot more picking out of it.'

'The pater advised Mrs. Lincoln to settle, though—didn't he?—if she had a chance.'

'Yes, the pater always advises his clients honestly, sometimes against his own interests. But the partners are combative, and won't listen to reason. Litigants seldom do listen to reason. If they did, we lawyers should

lose our reason for being. And a friendly settlement is out of the question now, whatever it may have been a little while ago. Suits are going on both here and in America.'

'Yes, I know; and that reminds me that I had a question to ask you. Has anything been heard of Jack? I am aware it is a tabooed subject, and I should not think of mentioning it to father or mother. All the same, he and I were very good friends, though after I went to Marlborough I saw very little of him, and I cannot help wondering what has become of him. Poor old Jack!'

'You need not waste your pity on him, Charlie. He is not worthy of it. Jack behaved very badly.'

'You mean he was always getting into scrapes?'

'Always. And he gave father and mother no end of trouble. At first they thought it was all boyishness and high

spirits, and that he would steady as he grew older. But the last thing he did was the worst.'

'Running away from Liverpool?'

'Yes; and before he went away he ran heavily into debt, and it cost the pater no end of money to put things straight—this is entirely between ourselves, Charlie—and if you add to that what it cost when he went wrong at Cambridge, it comes to a nice penny.'

'Bad enough, in all conscience! All the same, there are worse things than running into debt, and I don't quite see——'

'Jack did worse. It was not merely getting into debt, though in his case there was not a shadow of excuse. Just consider: when he came back from Australia, penniless, he was kindly treated and freely forgiven. Father found him a good place in Liverpool, where he might have done well. But almost from the first, as we afterwards ascertained, he went to the bad, and, worse

still, played the hypocrite. He hoodwinked his employers completely, made them believe he was as steady as a growing tree, and wrote letters home telling how well he was doing. Then, when exposure became inevitable, he just disappeared without writing a line to any of us to say he was sorry, and left father to pay the piper. And naught has been heard from him or of him since. What could be worse than that, I should like to know?'

'As bad as that, was it? No wonder father won't talk about it, and hasn't been the same man since!'

'Who says he has not been the same man since?' asked Edward sharply.

'Isn't it evident? And Lillywhite was saying so only the other day.'

'So it was Lillywhite that gave you the idea. Did he say anything about Jack?'

'He merely asked whether anything had been heard of him.'

'I wish Lillywhite would mind his own

business. And you are both wrong. I don't think father has altered in the least, except in being three years older, and he is still one of the most active men for his age that I know.'

In making this assertion Edward spoke rather diplomatically than truthfully. Leonard Prince had not been the same man since the disappearance of his eldest son. His hope that he should get used to the skeleton in the cupboard had been realized only in part. The deceit which he was obliged to practise fretted him, a deceit of which he was reminded every time he paid Mrs. Lincoln her dividends, every time he remitted the insurance company the premiums on his life policies, and every time he received a cheque or a 'put off' from Peploe and Pope. Then, again, the sense of the heavy pecuniary liability which he had assumed, and the fear, never long absent from his thoughts, that the fraud might be discovered when he was least expecting it,

weighed on his mind, and damped his naturally high spirits. He gave more time to business and less to sport, rode less boldly to hounds, and seldom went from home — never when Edward was away. His friends ascribed these changes to increasing years, and as he always contrived to be cheerful at home, they passed almost unobserved by his wife. And then there came to pass an event which, by adding to Mr. Prince's professional engagements, made his personal anxieties easier to bear.

This was the death of his friend and neighbour, Mr. Lincoln, on which, for some doubtless sufficient yet not very apparent reason, his partners fell out amongst themselves and went to law. Mrs. Lincoln was compelled in self-defence to join in the fray ; and the proceedings on her behalf were conducted by Mr. Prince, who entrusted the active management of the suit (which speedily drifted into Chancery) to Edward, and the interests at stake being important, and frequent consul-

tations with counsel necessary, the young man had to spend the greater part of his time in London.

We may now return to the two brothers.

'Which way are we going?' asked Edward, as they came to a place where three roads met.

'By Wroughton Shaughs, of course. It will save us a mile and a half, at least.'

'How about the gates, though?'

'I have not been this way since last season, but now that hunting is beginning they are sure to be open.'

Turning from the highroad into a narrow lane, they went on till they came to a gate leading into a bridle-path.

'Let me, I rather like opening gates,' said Charlie.

Edward made no objection; he did not like opening gates. But Charlie found the task more difficult than he had expected. His mare would not be still, and the gate,

though unlocked, was ingeniously fastened with a chain, a ring, a staple, and a hook.

'Get off,' said Edward.

'No, thank you. I never get off to open a gate, and if there were not so many broken stones on the road——'

'Allow me, sir,' said a wayfarer, who, while Charlie was struggling with the gate, had come up unperceived; 'allow me, sir;' and with that the wayfarer loosed the chain and drew back the gate.

He was a particularly disreputable-looking tramp, with a grim, unshaven face, a patch over one eye, and nothing much on but a sailor's jumper and a pair of ragged trousers.

'Thank you. I say, Ned, have you any coppers?'

Ned answered 'No,' and rode on without giving the tramp a second glance.

'Well, there's a sixpence for you. And, look here: would you mind letting out that curb-chain a link while I light a cigar?'

The tramp looked at the cigar longingly.

'God bless you, sir!' he said, 'but might I make so bold as to ask if you have a bit o' baccy about you. I have not had a smoke for twenty-four hours' (producing a short clay pipe), 'nor yet broken my fast.'

'Poor fellow! Here are a couple of cigars; and take this shilling and go and get a good meal. Go at once!' And Charlie, touching his horse with his heel, cantered off.

But the tramp did not go at once. He lighted one of the cigars, and as he smoked it leaned on the gate, and looked after the two horsemen.

'That's Charlie,' he soliloquized. 'The same kind-hearted, generous lad he always was. How he has altered! If he hadn't been with Ned I shouldn't have known him. No wonder he did not know me. And Ned —but he hardly so much as looked my way. He is too superior a person to notice a poor devil of a tramp—and we were never real

friends. Anyhow, I need expect no help from him. But the old man would give me a lift if he knew—or Charlie. To which of these shall I apply, and how? A few pounds, just enough to take me to London and buy me a kit. . . . But it would never do for me to go to the house any more than for Charlie to come to me at a boosing ken. And whatever I do I must keep close. There are constables at Peele, and some fellow might—— By G—d, my back tingles at the mere idea! . . . I have it—a note. Yes, I think I can fake a scribble that will fetch him, and without exciting suspicion, either. And now for some grub; and it shall be a skinful. I have not had so much money in my pocket since I left Colchester.'

'What did you give that fellow?' asked Edward, when Charlie came up with him.

'Eighteenpence and two cigars.'

'Eighteenpence and two cigars! Say two shillings—nearly as much as a labourer in

these parts earns by a day of honest work —and for opening a gate !'

'He was starving.'

'How do you know ?'

'He said so—and he looks it.'

'Of course he said so—tramps always do ; yet I'll be bound the rascal has as much money in his pockets as you have. I never give anything to beggars—on principle.'

'And deuced little to anybody else—also on principle,' said the other *sotto voce.*

'You have been taken in, my boy, and not for the first time. You are too impulsive. If you give to everybody who pleads poverty, you will end by being poor yourself.'

Charlie, irritated by his brother's reproof, and painfully conscious that he had acted impulsively, and, in all probability, been victimized by an impostor, held his peace.

After passing through two more gates that were easily opened, they crossed a big field and came to yet another gate, armed

with spikes, which opened, or, rather, should have opened, into a grassy lane.

On one side of this gate, and nearly as high, was a stiff flight of posts and rails.

'It is not locked, I hope,' said Edward.

'Worse, it is nailed.'

'By Jove! we shall have to go back, then.'

'That would be two miles out of our way, and throw us late for the meet. We can jump this rail; there is turf on both sides.'

'In cold blood—and that drop! Not if I know it.'

'Merry Boy will do it easily. Come, I'll give you a lead. Kitty likes a bit of timber.'

The next moment Charlie was over. Edward, who, though a fair horseman, was not a bold rider, did not seem to like it, but liking still less to turn tail, he let Merry Boy follow, and, albeit the old horse hit the top rail with his hind-legs, he alighted safely in the lane, round a bend of which Charlie had already disappeared.

'God bless me, another gate!' exclaimed

Edward, as he turned into the road. 'Nailed up, of course.'

'Also locked,' said Charlie coolly, at the same time backing his horse.

'Good heavens! you are surely not going to jump it? It is a foot higher than the other, and as strong as a brick wall. If Kitty hits it with her fore-legs she will turn a somersault and break your neck and her own back.'

'There is nothing else for it. We cannot jump the rails from this side, the drop is too big.'

'Nothing else for it! I would rather wait here all day. Why on earth you came this way I cannot imagine. We had far better have gone round by the road.'

'It is a regular bridle-path. How could I know that the rascally old farmer had hung new gates and nailed them up?'

'What shall we do, then? I have it! One of us must run to Oxbridge for a blacksmith, or a hammer or something, while the

other waits here. You are the better runner——'

'I am not so sure about that. Would not it be fairer if we tossed up?' remarked Charlie, laughing. The reproof was still rankling in his mind, and Ned's discomfiture amused him. 'However, I think we can do better than that. We must make a circumbendibus and do the fence.'

'What are you thinking about? It is impossible.'

It certainly looked so. The fence was a high bank, topped by an impenetrable blackthorn hedge, and with a ditch on both sides.

'I think, though, I noticed a practicable place in that corner,' said Charlie, turning his horse round.

At the corner in question the fence turned at almost right angles, and the blackthorn hedge was weaker, and the ditch narrower than elsewhere.

'This will do. You go first, Ned, and

make a gap for me and Kitty. It is just the sort of place old Merry Boy likes. He is as clever as a cat, and Kitty is such a beggar to rush. As likely as not she would go slap into the thickest part and stick fast.'

'It is the most beastly place I ever saw. No, thank you; I prefer to play second fiddle on the present occasion. You go first.'

'Certainly, if you will let me ride Merry Boy. But why not lead him over? You go on; I'll send him after you.'

'A happy thought; I'll act on it at once,' remarked Ned, dismounting with great alacrity. 'But hold him till I climb the bank. I don't want to be jumped upon.'

'All right! Go ahead! Say when you are ready to catch him.'

'Now!' shouted Edward as he disappeared on the other side of the fence.

Charlie, dropping the bridle, gave Merry Boy a touch with his whip, whereupon the

old hunter sprang over the ditch, scrambled up the bank, and pushed through the gap, which he greatly widened. But Edward somehow missed catching him, and the next moment Merry Boy was justifying his name by cantering merrily round the field.

Meanwhile Kitty was dancing about on her hind-legs, and Charlie vainly trying to make her take the jump quietly. In the end he was obliged to let her take it as she liked, with a rush that carried her triumphantly over the ditch and through the gap, only to fall ignominiously on her head in the field beyond.

'Serve you right, you impetuous hussy!' said the young fellow as he scrambled to his feet. 'You will not be in such a hurry next time.'

And with that he remounted and galloped after Merry Boy, whom Edward was vainly trying to catch. But the old horse yielded himself a willing captive to Charlie, who held him while his brother 'got up.'

'Call this a short-cut!' said Edward as soon as he could speak. 'Call this a short-cut! It is a cut I shall cut no more, I can tell you. I would rather go five miles round any day.'

'Oh, it is good fun, and all in the day's work,' returned the other, laughing.

'Fun! A fig for such fun!' exclaimed Ned in a tone of deep disgust.

After this they had no further trouble. An easy jump over some sheep-hurdles and a ten minutes' trot brought them within sight of Cobster Green.

CHAPTER V.

THE MEET.

'THERE they are; we are just in time,' said Charlie, pointing to the hounds, which were gambolling in a grassy glade, while the huntsman and whip stood guard over them.

The horsemen on the ground did not exceed a dozen, for the Master detested a big field—unless the fair element greatly preponderated—only one degree less than a blank day. Though his hard riding days were over, Mr. Vayle sat his bob-tailed gray like a centaur, and was as keen a Nimrod as when he first carried a horn half a century before. Near him rode a young girl, to whom he paid great attention, for Mr. Vayle was still a gay cavalier, and, as

was said, could refuse nothing to fair ladies who favoured him with their company and admired the forest which he so dearly loved, and of which he knew every nook and corner, and almost every tree. Among his other peculiarities was a habit of saying quite unconsciously and irrelevantly, 'Dear me! Dear me!' and speaking his thoughts in a soft (and, fortunately, generally inaudible) undertone.

The name of the young girl was Olive Lincoln; her years were about seventeen. As touching her person, she was slim and well-shapen, slightly built, and rather tall than short. She had a fair, soft skin, peach-like cheeks, clearly cut features (nose a little retroussé), dark hair, and large violet eyes, with long lashes, which were merry, mischievous or tender as the humour took her.

As touching her costume, Olive wore a dark-green habit and a jockey-cap, which became her to admiration, and she rode a

corky blood cob, hardly less good-looking and high-spirited than herself.

'We are rather late, I fear,' said Edward, after he and his brother had greeted Miss Lincoln and the Squire. 'I hope you have not been waiting for us?'

'No, indeed I have not. I never care to quarrel with people for not coming, and I am like time and tide: I wait for no man. (Dear me! dear me! What a conceit that young man must have of himself!)'

Miss Lincoln, who alone heard Mr. Vayle's 'aside,' laughed merrily.

'The Squire means that he waits only for ladies, Mr. Edward,' she said. 'He would not wait for you if you were really a prince. We are waiting for ladies now — Mary Windle and Kate Conyers, and the Spankaway girls.'

'There they come, down the Earl's Path,' said Charlie, who had sharp eyes and kept them open.

'That is right; I am glad of it,' observed the Squire. 'They will be here in two minutes. We will draw Earl's Wood, Horner.'

The huntsman (a stout short-legged old fellow, mounted on a horse the right colour for a hearse and big enough to draw one with a coffin inside) blew his horn and trotted off, followed by the pack. Next came Bill, the whip, who rode a common-looking, yet marvellously clever, bay cob, whose name, Noah's Ark, had been bestowed upon him because he was considered eminently safe and never shirked water.

Mr. Vayle, who possessed a sense of humour, had christened Horner's horse Pagan, partly on account of his colour, but chiefly because nobody had ever seen him on his knees. When he did fall at a fence it was always backwards, which was very convenient for Horner, who, being fat and heavy, found it much pleasanter to slip

over the animal's tail than come a 'cropper' over his head.

Earl's Wood was reached in a few minutes, and the hounds, all small foxhounds, were no sooner thrown in than their eager cries proclaimed that 'something was afoot.' Said something proved to be a hare, which gave a very fair half-hour's run in the wood and out of it. Edward Prince got his gentle tittuping; the girls had good fun jumping the drains and dodging the trees; and when the hare was killed, the old Squire dismounted from his bob-tailed gray, waved his hat, and shouted 'Whoo-whoop!' with the best.

While this was going on Charlie had spoken to the huntsman and a forest keeper who was watching the sport, and made a confidential communication to Miss Lincoln, which bore fruit later on.

'Where shall we try now?' asked Mr. Vayle.

'Let us try the Warren,' said Olive.

'Why the Warren?'

'We may find a fox there; the keeper saw one only this morning.'

'Oh, that is it, is it? And would you really like us to find a fox?'

'So much; and so would Mary Windle and Kate Conyers — would not you, girls?'

'So much!' echoed the young women in question. 'Do draw the Warren, Mr. Vayle.'

'Well, I suppose we must. (Dear me! dear me!) What do you say, Horner?'

'I'm willing, sir; if we don't find a long-tail, we shall mebbe find a hare, and the fox-hunting gentlemen cannot complain. They never come hereabouts,' said the huntsman, whom a cap, collected by Charlie, and a long pull from Charlie's flask, had put in excellent humour, and made him feel—for the moment—as bold as brass.

So Horner blew his horn again, and the

cavalcade made, at a round trot, for the Warren.

'It's your fault, Charlie,' whispered Miss Lincoln, who had dropped behind in order to have a word with him. 'If you had not heard about the fox and put me up to it, I should not have asked the Squire, and——'

'He would not have done it for anybody else. Never mind, I'll take all the responsibility.'

'But suppose I get my neck broken or lame Daisy, or——'

'You won't do either one or the other. I'll pilot you.'

'Thank you; I'll do my best to follow. But what will mother say? She won't let me go with the foxhounds for fear of accidents, and now——'

'You are not going with foxhounds.'

'But we are going to hunt a fox.'

'That remains to be seen. We have first to find a fox, and it will be no easy matter

to bustle him out of the Warren, I can tell you.'

'I think we shall find a fox, Charlie; I am sure we shall. The Squire says it is an ideal hunting day, and I am sure there is a scent.'

'Not a doubt of it; but that does not prove we shall find a fox.'

'We shall find a fox; I have a presentiment. If we don't, I will never ask Mr. Vayle to draw the Warren again. So it will be all your fault. But what shall I do about Potts? He is riding old Tinker, one of the carriage-horses. I don't think it can jump a bit, and Potts would fall off if it did —and as mother told him to take good care of me he considers it his duty to go wherever I go.'

'Oh, never mind old Potts! We will drop him into the first ditch, and leave him to vegetate.'

'Charlie, you are really too bad;' and then she laughed, and said, 'Poor Potts! I hope

the ditch will be soft; he is a good old man,' and laughed again.

Just then Edward came alongside with so grave a mien that Olive rallied him.

'Why so serious, Mr. Edward? Aren't you enjoying yourself?' she asked.

'I have enjoyed myself exceedingly so far; but this is a serious matter.'

'What is?'

'Drawing the Warren for a fox. I doubt whether it is the right thing. I quite admit that the Squire is lord of the forest, so to speak, by general consent; but it is a question in my mind whether the Warren can fairly be considered a part of the forest.'

'I don't think anybody will mind the question in your mind, Mr. Edward—if we find a fox in the Warren—and if we do, mine be the blame, for it was I who asked the Squire to draw the Warren.'

'In that case there is nothing more to be said,' returned Edward, his grave face

relaxing into a smile, 'for where is the man who could refuse when Miss Lincoln asks?'

'I forgive your previous doubts in consideration of your pretty compliment. But here we are at the Warren. Where shall we go, Mr. Charles?' (It was always 'Mr. Charles' when Edward was present.) 'I have heard something about Upwind; which is Upwind?'

'You mean that foxes generally run upwind; but to-day there is no wind——-'

'So there can be no Up. What shall we do, then?'

'Well, it is a safe rule to stick to hounds; above all in a big cover like this, where they may slip away unseen and unheard.'

'All right, Mr. Charles; you stick to the hounds, and we'll all try to stick to you —won't we, Mr. Edward?'

'Certainly, Miss Lincoln, if you wish it. I am not sure, though, that Charlie is to be

trusted. He must be careful not to lead you into danger.'

'Or you. At any rate, where he goes I shall go ; and unless you keep with us you will be thrown out,' answered Olive rather sharply.

It displeased her to hear Charlie disparaged, and she did not 'care' for Edward.

CHAPTER VI.

THE RUN.

The Warren was a large wood, technically a part of the forest, but separated from the main portion of it by a broad stretch of turf. It was intersected by two rides and several bridle-paths, the trees and undergrowth being elsewhere so thick as to render progress on foot difficult, and on horseback well-nigh impossible.

When the field reached the wood Mr. Vayle marshalled his forces. The main point was to prevent Reynard (if perchance he should be found at home) from stealing back into the forest, in which event a run in the open would be out of the question. To this end he posted several men between the

wood and the forest, with instructions to head back the fox if he should attempt to break in that direction.

Bill, the whip, took his stand at the top of the principal ride; a long-legged brewer on a roan gelding, with a bit of red ribbon flying from its tail as a danger signal, and a sporting butcher on a thoroughbred screw which he wanted to sell, undertook to watch on one side of the covert; and the ladies and the keeper were asked to keep a look-out on the other.

Horner was then ordered to throw in his hounds and draw towards the higher ground, and away from the forest.

'If we don't take care we shall all be left lamenting,' said the Squire, when these dispositions had been made. 'The covert is so thick that you can neither see hounds nor hear a hallo. Twenty years ago, when the foxhounds used to come here, they once slipped out with a fox unseen by anybody, the huntsman got bogged, and the hounds

had a fine run of an hour and forty minutes all to themselves. (Dear me! Dear me!) Where are you going, Charlie?'

'Into the Warren with Horner. I can whip up to him.'

'Yes, yes; go. Quite right, and if you find, shout your loudest. (Dear me! Dear me! I wish I was as young as Charlie, or even that conceited jackanapes, his brother.')

Miss Windle and Miss Conyers, overhearing this soliloquy, laughed consumedly.

'What is the matter? Why are you laughing? (Dear me! Dear me! Youth is the time for laughter; why shouldn't they laugh?) Are you going too, Olive?'

'Yes, Squire; I should like to be as near the hounds as possible, if there is going to be any fun.'

'Quite right. Yes, go. But beware of trees and holes, and take care of your hat. (Dear me! Dear me! I wonder whether

it is the hounds or Prince Charlie she would best like to be near.')

Fortunately none save the object of it heard this *sotto voce*, and, blushing brightly, she followed her pilot, and was followed in her turn by Edward Prince and coachman Potts.

Nobody else went into the wood, and they had not gone far before two of the party began to wish they had stayed with the others. They were forced to ride in single file, twisting and turning, dodging the boughs, and threading their way through the brambles, their horses slipping where the ground was smooth, and stumbling where it was rough.

'Stoop low and shut your eyes, Olive,' said Charlie; 'never mind Daisy—she will take care of herself, and I will take care of you.'

Which he did so effectually that not a bough touched her.

'Can anybody see the hounds?' inquired

Horner. 'If they was to get on a line now we shouldn't be in it.'

'I wish we were not in it,' growled Edward. 'I knew Charlie would lead us into some mess. Confound it! I believe I have cut my nose.'

'So you have,' said Olive, glancing round. 'It is bleeding dreadfully. You look like a red Indian in his war-paint.'

Whereupon Edward, muttering an imprecation, applied his handkerchief, thereby adding greatly to his difficulties; with the same hand he had both to guide his horse and ward off the branches, one of which, flying back, crushed Potts' castor, and bonneted him completely.

'Oh, Lord!' shouted the coachman, and, dropping his reins, he made frantic efforts to extricate himself. But the lining of his hat having fouled on his rather large nose, he found this no easy task. In the end, however, he emerged, very red in the face, and uttering strange oaths.

All laughed, even Edward, who was beginning to think that the tip of his nose would go on bleeding for ever.

'Oh my, that hurt, that did!' howled the huntsman. 'Ooo, oo, oo!' While he was laughing at Potts his shin-bone had collided against the bole of a tree and got the worst of it. 'I won't come into this 'ere hole again, not for ten long-tails. And where's the hounds? They may be a mile away by this time. Thank goodness, here's a path at last. We can get along a bit now.'

All put their horses into a brisk trot, Horner still leading, for he best knew the way.

'Hark!' he cried, stopping short so suddenly that Kitty nearly cannoned against Pagan. 'Cannot you hear summut?'

'By Jove! I do believe it's a whimper.'

'Ay is it'—listening intently—'it's Ringlet, and when Ringlet speaks you may be sure there's summut. There it is again. It's a line, Mr. Charlie; it's a line. Hike

to Ringlet! Hike to Ringlet! Faw-rud! Faw-rud!'

And the old fellow, bending over his saddle-bow to avoid impending branches, goes off at a canter, followed by the others, all in a state of high excitement, for Ringlet's solitary note has now swollen into a full chorus.

Charlie, mindful of the Squire's injunction, shouts his loudest; Olive cheers on the hounds; Edward pockets his handkerchief and lets his nose take care of itself; and Potts, squaring his elbows and using his heels, succeeds in putting old Tinker into a high and ponderous gallop.

'This way,' cries the huntsman; 'we can't see 'em, and we don't know what it is—mebbe a hare, after all. We must just ride to the music till we get out of the wood.'

Presently they emerge into a broad path, riding, as before, to the music, for the hounds still keep to the thick of the wood.

'Bill should be somewhere about here,'

says Charlie, 'and hark! there's a hallo! A fox, by all that is glorious! A fox! Hike hallo! hike hallo! Forrud away! Forrud away!'

'How do you know it's a fox?' asks Edward.

'Because it's Bill's voice, and he knows better than to tally-ho a hare. Hike hallo! hike hallo! I hope Mr. Vayle and the others will hear. Blow again, Horner.'

At the top of the wood, which they reach at the same time as the hounds, are the brewer, the butcher, and the whip, holding up their hats, and halloing till they are black in the face.

'He's only just gone; he's slipped through the gateway into that field. There, Beauty has it! That's the line. Fawrud to Beauty. Well done, old girl!'

'Hike fawrud! Hike fawrud!'

'I hope the Squire has heard the row, and will be able to catch us up,' says Charlie. 'Shout again! Forrud, forrud,

forrud, to Beauty! Sound another blast, Horner.'

Meantime Bill has opened the gate, and all ride after the hounds, which are racing across a big pasture to a breast-high scent, the butcher leading on his thoroughbred screw. Next come Charlie and Olive, Bill and the brewer, followed by Horner and Potts.

The first fence is a low bank, with a widish ditch on the near side. To the surprise of everybody, himself probably included, Tinker takes it in his stride, and the coachman sticks on.

'Bravo, Potts!' shouts Charlie; 'if you go on like that you will be in at the death. . . . Not quite so fast, Olive. If we don't save our horses now they will not live through the run. Never mind though the hounds do get a bit ahead; they cannot keep up this pace over that plough.'

Nor do they. The scent grows colder, and two or three freshly-ploughed fields

with openable gates are traversed at a trot, the hounds hunting beautifully, checking only once, and recovering the line without help from the huntsman.

Then more grass and faster going ; small enclosures and blind fences, with few jumpable places.

'The butcher seems inclined to make the running—let him go first and make gaps for us,' says Charlie, whose native daring is sobered by a sense of his responsibility for the safety of his fair companion.

At the third fence after leaving the plough Tinker blunders into a blind ditch, throwing Potts clean over his head, and completing the destruction of his rider's hat.

'He is done to a turn—you had better go home,' says Charlie, after ascertaining that Potts is none the worse. 'And tell Mrs. Lincoln, with my compliments, that I will take good care of Miss Olive.'

The field, now reduced to seven, continue

the chase, the hounds for the most part running mute to a burning scent. A few yards behind them ride the brewer, the butcher, and the whip, closely followed by Olive and Charlie, while Edward and Horner bring up the rear.

The chase has lasted nearly an hour, and shows no signs of coming to a close, when the hounds run on to a highway where two roads meet (one of them bounded by a wide brook), throw up their heads, and stop short. They have lost the scent.

Horner makes a couple of casts without result, and things are beginning to look serious, when a faint hallo in the distance, and a hat at the end of a stick, give a timely hint as to the direction taken by the fox.

'He has crossed the brook,' says the huntsman, sounding his horn. 'Hike hallo! hike hallo! Yoh over! yoh over!'

'Hike hallo! hike hallo!' echoes Bill, whipping the hounds up the brink. 'Yoh

over ! yoh over ! Beauty has it again. Faw-rud to Beauty ! Faw-rud ! Faw-rud !'

The hounds swim the stream in the wake of Beauty, and after 'feathering' a few seconds on the farther side, go off full cry.

'All very fine,' says Edward ; 'but how are we to get over ?'

Seeing that the opposite bank, besides being high, is crowned with a three-barred rail, this is a pertinent question. The brewer, the butcher and the whip answer it on the instant. Crossing the girth-high stream, they leap their horses to the bank, and then dismounting and breaking down the topmost rail, lead them over the others.

'Dare you ?' asks Charlie of Olive.

'Go, and I will follow.'

Charlie goes.

'Let Daisy have her head,' he shouts, as Kitty scrambles up the bank, and then, though there is hardly standing room, leaps his mare over the rails without dismounting.

Olive does the same, and the next moment they are galloping after the hounds, which, like the horses, have been greatly refreshed by the check and the bath.

'Are you going to have it, Mr. Prince?' asks Horner, looking ruefully at the obstacle.

Though neither a bold rider nor a keen sportsman, Edward has, so far, gone very well—partly, perhaps, out of a spirit of emulation, partly, it may be, because he does not like to lag behind when a lady leads the way, and that lady Olive Lincoln. But the brook looks ugly and the bank dangerous, to say nothing of the rail; and it requires a strong effort to screw up his courage to the sticking-point and let his horse go. But at the critical moment his nerve fails him. As Merry Boy rises at the bank, Edward clutches at the bridle, and pulls him back into the stream; whereupon the bewildered and indignant animal plunges down the middle of it, flounders into a hole, and only

after a desperate bout of swimming and scrambling succeeds in getting back to dry land.

'I don't think I should try that again, sir, if I was you,' observes the huntsman. 'You'll be drownded if you do. That is a main dangerous place, that is; though when I was young like your brother and Mr. Macadam and Bill and the butcher, I should ha' thought naught on it—naught. But I'm an old fellow now. Come along o' me; I think I know the fox's point. We'll be at it as soon as them.'

'You can go where you hanged please, Horner! I am wet through from the waist, and shall go straight home. I wish we had not found that brute of a fox. I never go out with my brother that I don't get into some beastly mess,' answered Edward savagely.

He was not habitually bad-tempered, but an involuntary cold bath on an October day, with a ten-mile ride in wet clothes and

water-logged boots before him, would try the patience of a saint.

'Call him a sportsman!' soliloquizes Horner, as he goes on his way; 'why, he is not fit to be named in the same day as his brother. Mr. Charlie's the boy for me. He both rides straight and takes a pleasure in seeing hounds hunt. Hark! is not that 'em? His point is Welsby Coppice, I do believe. Hold up, hoss! You're not a-getting tired already, sure-ly.'

'Isn't this glorious, Charlie?' cries Olive, as they reach the crest of a hill, over which the hounds have disappeared a few moments previously, and up which the four men have walked to ease their horses. 'Is not this glorious?'

She might well say so. Below them was a breezy, wide-stretching common, which sloped gently towards a verdant, well-wooded valley, dotted with quaint cottages and red farmhouses, and bounded far away by a shining river.

'Yes, that is Harold's Common; as big as a parish, they say. And see how the hounds are going—all in a cluster. Well, we are not likely to lose sight of them, that is one comfort, and, by Jove, there he is!'

'The fox, do you mean—where?'

'Don't you see that dark object, a mere speck, about half a mile before the hounds?'

'And that is the fox! Poor fellow! Do you know, Charlie, I almost hope he may escape.'

'I don't think he will—the scent is too good. But if we don't go on the hounds will escape us. Come along.'

And they go helter-skelter down the hill, Macadam and Charlie leading, for the butcher has taken a good deal out of his thoroughbred, and speed is not the strong point of Noah's Ark. But the going is good, and after a two-mile gallop all overtake the hounds, just as the latter leave the common for the fields, and exchange grass

for plough. And then the pace slackens —fortunately, for it is no joke to face wide ditches and formidable fences with fagged horses. Even the hard-riding brewer is glad to let the whip lead the way and keep a keen look-out for gates and weak places.

But jumps are not always avoidable, and at the very last obstacle—a rail and a ditch—which has to be taken flying, Daisy comes to grief. Charlie goes first, and then, with keen anxiety, turns to see how it will fare with Olive.

'Send her at it,' he cries; 'it's rather a big place.'

The little mare does her best, but being well-nigh spent, hits the rail hard, and goes into the ditch instead of over it. Olive luckily falls clear, and before Charlie and Macadam can dismount to help her, is on her feet. As for Daisy, she seems disposed to rest for awhile in the ditch, and it is with some difficulty that they get her out of it.

'Whether we lose the hounds or not, we must have no more jumping,' says Charlie, as he helps Olive into the muddy saddle. 'Remember, I am responsible for your safety, and you would not like any harm to befall Daisy.'

'Not for the world. But I should be very sorry to spoil your sport. Ride on after the hounds; I can take care of myself.'

'Certainly not. What would your mother say? And the hounds have stopped running. Don't you see them feathering in the middle of that stubble?'

'Have they killed?'

'I don't think so. You would hear Bill shouting "Whoo-whoop!" if they had. The scent has either failed or the fox run to ground. Let us go on and see.'

The hounds were baying at the mouth of a drain.

'He's in here, sir,' said the whip, who was prone on the grass, listening intently.

'I can hear him. Shall I run to yonder farmhouse, get a spade, and try to dig him out?'

'Don't, Charlie, don't! He is a gallant fox, and has given us a splendid run. Let him live,' pleaded Olive.

'Very well—yes, I think he deserves to save his brush—an hour and forty minutes with only two checks. What do you say, Macadam?'

'I am quite of your opinion; and it is Hobson's choice. This drain is deep, and we have no terriers.—You may as well call them off, Bill. How far are we from Peele?'

'If that house across the fields be the King George, and I think it is, nigh on fifteen miles. It's been a clinking run, Mr. Charlie, it has that.'

'You are right, and you have ridden well up, Bill. Here's a crown for you! And now let us go to the King George and refresh our horses and ourselves, and then

we will hie us home. What has become of my brother and Horner, I wonder ?'

'They did not like that brook, I think. But never you fear, sir. Horner will turn up. He does not ride as straight as you and Mr. Macadam, but he's generally somewhere about at the end of a run.'

The whip proved a true prophet. As hunters and hounds drew up at the door of the inn, Horner came jogging up the road.

'What have you done ?' he asked.

Bill told him.

'I felt sure he was making for Welsby Coppice, and he'd ha' got there, too, if the hounds hadn't pressed him so hard. The Squire will be as well pleased as if he had ridden the run himself. But he'd ha' been all the better pleased if you'd ha' taken the brush home in your hat, Miss Lincoln. He likes a kill, the Squire does.'

'But I don't, and I am sure the brush is much better where it is than in my hat. Here is something to put into yours' (hand-

ing him half a sovereign) ; 'and will you see, please, that the horses are properly attended to ? and then you can go into the house and get something for yourselves.'

'Thank you, miss, thank you kindly,' said the old fellow, pocketing the tip and touching his cap. 'But I'll stop where I am. If I was to get off it would take me half an hour to get on again, I'm that stiff and rheumatical. I'll have some cheese and bread, and sixpenn'orth o' whisky, Bill ; and slip the bit out of Pagan's mouth and bring him some gruel. He'll not run away, I'll warrant.'

CHAPTER VII.

GOING HOME.

The ride home was long, and, so far as pace went, slow, yet very pleasant withal. The declining sun shone brightly on a charming landscape, which still retained much of its autumnal glory, and the run and its incidents, besides being pleasant to think about, made a subject for conversation which it seemed impossible to exhaust.

Horner, as was meet, rode first at the head of his pack. Next came Bill and Mr. Macadam—the latter acting as amateur second whip—to whom followed Olive and Charlie. The butcher, whose horse had gone dead lame, brought up the rear, and was soon left hopelessly behind.

'We had better keep together; horses like company, and this jog-trot is quite fast enough,' had said Charlie to Miss Lincoln.

'By all means. It will be so much more cheerful for us, besides being better for the horses,' answered Olive, with a sigh.

'Are you tired, Olive, that you sigh?' asked Charlie softly.

'A little. But it was not that.'

'What then?'

'I was thinking about my mother. She will be frantically anxious. What time shall we get home?'

'You at six; I half an hour later. I don't think you need distress yourself on that account. I suppose Potts would deliver my message?'

'I have no doubt he would, also a few observations of his own. He thinks nobody can take care of me but himself, and will tell mother that without him I should be sure to come to desperate grief.'

'Well, your appearance at home safe and sound will prove the contrary.'

'For which thanks to you, Charlie. If you had not piloted me so carefully and told me what to do, I should never have seen the end of the run—and I have enjoyed it so much! So much that I am almost ashamed of myself, for I fear it is very cruel.'

'What is?'

'Hunting.'

'There's no doubt it is, in a sense; but what is not? You cannot eat a mutton chop without killing a sheep, nor drink a glass of water without swallowing a lot of microscopic organisms. And remember that if there was no hunting all these hounds would have been drowned when they were whelps.'

'So we may regard ourselves as philanthropists. Instead of being a cruel amusement, hunting is a humane pursuit. Foxes die in order that hounds may live. I vote

for the hounds,' returned Olive brightly; for though she rather suspected that there lurked a fallacy in Charlie's theory, she was not disposed to scrutinize too strictly his ingenious argument in support of so pleasant a pastime.

'That's it, Miss Lincoln,' put in the brewer. 'If there was no hunting there would be no hounds, and if we killed no foxes there would be no hunting. And you may do a lot of hunting without killing—to-day, for instance. The betting is always ten to one on the fox. I suppose you have nothing of the sort in America, Miss Lincoln?'

'Do you mean fox-hunting?'

'Yes.'

'You are quite mistaken, Mr. Macadam,' said Olive, who, though she liked hunting and England exceedingly, was too patriotic to admit that her country played second fiddle in anything whatever. 'You are quite mistaken. I believe there is very

good fox-hunting in Virginia, and we have something far finer—buffalo-hunting on the prairies and grizzly-bear-hunting in the Rockies.'

'But they hunt buffaloes without hounds—just ride up to them and shoot them down. The poor brutes have no chance,' said the brewer.

'I don't call that sport at all,' said Charlie; 'hunting without hounds is like dancing without music. And then there is no jumping.'

'And what is that like?' demanded Olive tartly.

'Fox-hunting without jumping is like war without fighting.'

'Or beer without hops,' suggested the brewer.

'Or love without kisses,' added Charlie.

'All the same, America is——'

'Your country, and you are quite right to stick up for it. I admit your superiority as to buffaloes and grizzlies, and I dare say

it is good fun hunting them. But I am quite content with Old England and fox-hunting ; I want nothing better.'

'Hear, hear!' said the brewer ; 'Old England for ever, and may we never have worse sport than we have had to-day!'

'That is a sentiment in which I can concur without reserve,' observed Olive. 'It is the best day's sport I ever had ; and I don't think I shall have a better until I hunt the buffalo and the grizzly in their native wilds.'

And then they all laughed. When people are in high spirits a small joke goes a long way.

An hour's alternate jog-trotting and walking brought them to Rodwell Cross, and there they parted company, the hounds and the brewer going one way, Miss Lincoln and Charlie another.

'My mother and I were talking about you the other day,' said Olive, after a short interval of silence.

'I hope you were speaking well of me.'

'I am not sure that you would think it well. My mother said that you were not cut out for a lawyer, and I rather agree with her.'

'So do I. To tell the truth, I don't like the law, and I am not a lawyer by choice.'

'You would rather have been something else?'

'I would rather have been a soldier. I wanted to go into the army, but, as my father and mother objected, I yielded to their wishes, and became an articled clerk, a good deal against the grain. My father is very good, though. He does not tie me to the desk. "Enjoy yourself while you are young," he said. "Care will come soon enough. If you are not ploughed more than once at your exams. I shall be content."'

'And have you been ploughed?

'Never. My pride would not let me, and the exams. are not very difficult.'

'But you don't spend much time at the office?'

'No more than I can help.'

'And is that the way you intend to go through life—doing no more than you can help?' asked Olive, rather contemptuously.

'I did not say I do no more work than I can help,' returned Charlie, with some asperity. 'I said I spent no more time in the office than I could help, which is a very different matter. And there is no particular reason why I should work hard. Ned does. He likes it, and old Lillywhite is a host in himself, to say nothing of my father; and, though he is fond of field sports, no man in the county works harder at his profession.'

'Yes, your father is a very fine man. Everybody respects him. He has been very good to us. My mother says that there is nobody in the world in whom she has such absolute confidence. He is integrity itself.'

'Yes, and he is kindness itself. I would rather lose my right hand than vex my father. It was to please him that I gave up my idea of going into the army.'

'It was not to please your mother, then?'

'It pleased them both. If the pater had been left to himself I think he would have consented. But she would not hear of it—she comes of a Quaker family, and has some Quaker notions about soldiering and that—and if you want to please my father you must please my mother. . . . I am afraid you think me a very idle fellow, Olive.'

'No, I would not say that. You hunt and fish, and play cricket and football with great energy and success. No, you are far from idle. But you don't seem to care about getting on. Now, in America, a young man in your position would throw all his energies into business.'

'Make a fortune, you mean? By the time I should have made a fortune I should have lost the capacity to enjoy it. I would

rather go on as I am. I shall have enough for my wants.'

'But could you not try to make a name?'

'What chance has a country solicitor of making a name, I should like to know?'

'Oh, there are ways! You might get into Parliament, for instance. Anyhow, if I were a man I should not be content to be a nobody. I would either make a fortune or a name, or in some other way win distinction.'

'I lost my chance of winning distinction when I went into my father's office instead of going into the army, and I shall never have another—unless the French come and the Yeomanry Cavalry are called out,' said Charlie, laughing lightly, yet not without a touch of bitterness. 'But here we are at your lodge-gates, and just at the time I expected. The church clock is striking six. Shall I go in with you?'

'Of course you must, and give an account

of your stewardship and help me to make my peace with my mother.'

'All right! Let us trot up the avenue, and then she will know we are coming.'

As the two belated ones reined up before the house a footman threw open the door, and a plump little woman, with a round, fat face, lively black eyes, and wearing widow's weeds, appeared at the threshold.

'At last! Thank heaven you are safe, Olive! If you only knew how anxious I have been! When I heard the sound of hoofs in the avenue, I feared it might be the huntsman coming to tell me you were killed. Why didn't you return with Potts?'

'Because I should have had to leave off at the very beginning of the run. I would not have done it for a thousand Potts! He got home all right, I suppose?'

'He did get home, but I cannot say he was all right. His hat was battered all to pieces and fastened on with a handkerchief, his face scratched all over and encrusted

with blood, his coat torn and covered with mud, and Tinker lame. Potts returned in a sorry plight, I assure you; and he said you two were careering over the country like mad people, and he doubted whether either of you would come home alive. He frightened me dreadfully, and I don't think I shall ever let Olive——'

'Potts is an old teapot!' interposed Charlie. 'It was one of the finest runs ever known, Mrs. Lincoln, and no dangerous jumping, and Olive rode like an Amazon! If the fox had been killed, instead of running to ground, she would have got the brush.'

'Yes, Olive does ride well,' said Mrs. Lincoln, mollified by the young fellow's praise of her daughter; 'but that is no reason why you should lead her into danger.'

'He did not lead me into danger; he led me into safety,' answered the girl warmly. 'If you had only seen—he kept with me

all the time, went first over all the difficult places and told me what to do. But for him I should certainly have come to grief.'

'Well, well, we will say no more about it, only no more fox-hunting, if you please. Won't you stay and dine with us, Charlie? We will excuse your costume.'

'You are very kind, Mrs. Lincoln; but they are expecting me at home, and Kitty has had a hard day. I must get her made comfortable for the night as soon as possible.'

And then they shook hands, and the young fellow hied him homeward, musing, and not in the best of humours. It was not the first time Olive had hinted, though never before so plainly, that he was not taking life sufficiently in earnest, and that he ought to have higher aims and nobler pleasures than being merely a country lawyer, captain of the Peele Eleven, and riding straight to hounds. His conscience told him that the imputation was true, and

he did not like it; less, however, out of regard for his conscience than for Olive's good opinion, which he greatly desired. He had known her since she was eleven or twelve years old—that was why they called each other by their Christian names—and he was her senior by three years. But being as precocious as travelled American girls generally are, and having seen a good deal more of the world than he had, she treated him much as a strong-minded elder sister treats a wayward brother—ordered him about, made him fetch and carry for her, and occasionally admonished him for his good. Charlie, on his part, made no objection; he did not find it unpleasant to be ordered about by a pretty girl, and he liked Miss Lincoln so well that he would have suffered much rather than forfeit her goodwill or forego the pleasure of her society. He had never seriously asked himself whether he loved her. A little flirting was all very well; but the conscience aforesaid told him

that he was too young to become engaged, and existing arrangements were so entirely to his satisfaction that he had no wish to change them for a state of things that might interfere with hunting and cricket.

Nevertheless, Olive's strictures on his want of purpose were very galling, the more especially as, albeit in one sense true, they were not altogether deserved. She did not give him credit for the sacrifice he had made in renouncing his desire to enter the army. It had been the dream of his life to go to the wars, and he knew that he should never shine as a solicitor. The study and practice of the law were only made tolerable to him by being largely intermixed with sport, and out-of-door work in connection with Lord Hermitage's estate.

'If I can only please Olive by making my fortune as a lawyer, I may as well give it up as a bad job,' he thought. 'And I would rather please her than anybody else. But what can a fellow do? I might enlist;

but after the way Jack has behaved that would break their hearts entirely, and I am not sure that Olive would like me to be a private soldier.'

So it came to pass that, notwithstanding the good day's sport he had enjoyed, Charlie went home pensive and despondent.

Meanwhile Olive and her mother were making him the subject of another discussion.

'What have you and Charlie been talking about?' asked Mrs. Lincoln, as they sat in the drawing-room waiting for dinner to be announced.

'All sorts of things—the run and the hounds, and, lastly, about himself. I took the liberty of telling him what you said the other day—that he was not sufficiently in earnest, that he ought to have a purpose in life and try to make some show in the world.'

'How did he take it?'

'Very well. He never resents anything

I say. The trouble is that he does not like law a bit. He wanted to go into the army.'

'It was all very well he did not. All idle young men want to go into the army, I think.'

'Charlie is not idle, mother—anything but that. He works with great energy at anything he likes, and it is not his fault that he has been put into a profession which he detests.'

Mrs. Lincoln smiled.

'What would you have, my dear?' she said. 'A minute since you were blaming the young man; now you are praising him.'

'Well, I am afraid of his sinking into a nondescript and a nobody—half sportsman, half lawyer. He has it in him to do a great deal better than that; he is generous, courageous, and high-spirited, and in many things really very clever—much more so than some people imagine.'

'You have observed him very closely, I think.'

'Naturally. We were children together; and I always observe people. It is amusing.'

'All the same, Olive, there is a grave defect in Charlie's character. I fear he is unstable, and will never excel—except in sport. What if he does not like the law? He has gone into it, and it is his duty to conquer his dislike. Many a man has made a fortune and a name in a profession which he did not find congenial at first. Let him take example from his brother. Edward will get on. He works at this unfortunate suit of ours night and day. His knowledge of the law is simply immense. He seems to know everything and forget nothing.'

'Yes, he is a model young man, which is perhaps the reason I don't much like him.'

'You mean you don't like him because other people do.'

'That is not it. I dislike him because he is priggish and conceited, after the manner

of models. Then, he doesn't ride straight, and I detest his laugh.'

Mrs. Lincoln smiled again.

'That is a new fad of yours, Olive, judging people by their laugh,' she said; 'and if riding is to be the test, I admit that Edward is hopelessly inferior to his brother. But it is not a test of a man's moral worth, and judged by any other standard Edward is the better man. He is industrious and clever, as high-principled as his father, and altogether a most promising young man. I greatly prefer him to Charlie, and so, I think, must every sensible person.'

'Then I am not a sensible person, for I am sure I don't,' returned Olive defiantly.

'Well, well, there is no accounting for likes and dislikes,' said Mrs. Lincoln, with an air of amused resignation, 'and perhaps if I preferred Charlie you would prefer Ned. Some people go by the rule of contrary. But let us go in to dinner; the bell has rung, and you must be very hungry.'

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BLESSING.

'Got some gruel ready, Tom?' asked Charlie of the head-groom, as he rode into the stable-yard.

'Yes, sir.'

'Well, take good care of Kitty. We have had a clinking run and a long hack home. What are you doing with a fire in the harness-room?'

'Drying Mr. Edward's boots and saddle and things. He got into a brook or summat, and came home sousing wet.'

'Give Kitty a linseed mash—but no corn, mind, and no bran—and when she is cool sheet her well up and bandage her legs.'

And with that the young fellow hurried

into the house, for it was quite dinner-time ; but it took him only a few minutes to change his hunting-suit for evening dress, and he entered the dining-room with the second course.

A large, low-ceiled room it was, and oak-wainscoted ; at one end burnt a bright fire of logs, at the other shone resplendent a fine black oak cabinet and sideboard, lighted with wax candles, in its way quite a work of art, to the building of which Mr. Prince, who was curious in such matters, had given much time and thought. The windows were hung with crimson curtains, the walls adorned with choice oil-paintings, and all the arrangements were suggestive of good taste and easy circumstances.

'Had good sport, my boy, eh?' said Mr. Prince pleasantly, as Charlie took his seat.

'Capital! Found a fox and ran him an hour and thirty-five minutes with only two checks. Hasn't Ned told you?'

'He could not tell me more than he knew. He got into trouble at Cobbin Brook and came home. Gad! I would not have come home.'

'I think Edward did quite right to come,' observed Mrs. Prince gently, and with a slight lifting of her beautiful arched eyebrows. 'It would have been very foolish of him to go on with wet clothes and his boots full of water.'

'Ah, well, there's no accounting for tastes in these things—and Ned never was much of a sportsman.'

'I never pretended to be, father. *Chacun à son gout*, you know.'

'All the same, you rode like a sportsman to-day, Ned,' put in Charlie. 'If you had not got into the brook, you would have seen the end of the run as well as the best—and an accident may happen to anybody.'

The mother smiled. She knew that her sons were not always sympathetic, and the junior's generous defence of the elder, even

in so small a matter as this, touched a responsive chord in her heart.

'Well, one cannot help getting a bit excited when hounds are running,' said Ned, smiling in turn; 'and if Merry Boy had not blundered into the deepest part of the brook, I don't think I should have been far behind you.'

'Blundered, did he?' said Mr. Prince, with a gesture of surprise. 'The old horse does not often do that, unless—— However, it is perhaps as well you did not take much out of him. He will be fit for me to ride with the foxhounds on Thursday—if you will help Lillywhite to look after the shop, Charlie! Ned is going to town for a few days.'

'Of course I will, father; and if the weather holds out you ought to have good sport.'

'I hope Olive came to no harm,' said Mrs. Prince. 'I have never been able to reconcile myself to the idea of girls riding to hounds,

and I know that her mother is never quite happy when she is out.'

'She did not come to the least harm, and straight she rode, too—never shirked a single jump,' returned Charlie.

'Did not boggle at the brook, I suppose?' said Mr. Prince, with a side-glance at his elder son.

'Nor anything else.'

'If you mean that for me, father,' he said —'if you mean that I boggled at the brook, just let me tell you that I did nothing of the sort. If Merry Boy had not refused the bank and plunged into mid-stream, so wetting me through, I should have gone on ; but I am not so fond of hunting as to be indifferent to the consequences of a ducking.'

'You see what you have missed, Ned,' said the father mischievously—'the best part of a clinking run and a ride home with a pretty girl.'

Edward, who took himself too seriously to like being chaffed, did not deign to reply.

Before dinner was quite over the butler told Mr. Prince in an aside that Thomas Roots, from Windy Gap, would like to have a word with him.

'Bother Thomas Roots! Why cannot he come to the office in business hours? However, he is an important tenant, and always up to time with his rent. It is about that new barn he wants building, I suppose. See him, Charlie—it is in your line—and say that Lord Hermitage won't let us spend any more money in improvements this year; but after Lady Day I dare say we can manage it. Show Roots into my room, Hartly, and give him a glass of grog.'

Charlie had got rid of the farmer, and was on the point of returning to the drawing-room, when one of the maids gave him a note, which, on opening, he found to run as follows:

'The waif whom you so generously relieved this morning craves the favour of an

interview with Mr. Charles Prince. He has a very important communication to make, but, being in rags, would rather not show himself in the house. He will wait for an answer at the stable-yard gate.'

'He must be a queer tramp,' thought Charlie; 'this letter is well written and not badly expressed. Shall I see him? Ned would say he was a begging-letter impostor, and want to send for a constable. As likely as not, though, he is a decent fellow down on his luck. Anyhow, there is no harm in hearing what he has to say.'

So, after lighting his pipe and putting on a felt hat, he went leisurely into the stable-yard, unsuspicious of evil, and anticipating nothing more serious than a tramp's story, possibly true, but more probably false, ending with a request for money.

He found the man lounging against the gate-post, with his hands in his pockets and his hat slouched over his eyes.

'Well?' said Charlie, stopping before him.

'I should like a word with you, sir, if you would be so kind as to give me a hearing. But we might be overheard here; people are coming and going. Could we go somewhere? I shall not detain you long.'

The tone, voice and manners of the man were so different from those of the tramp who had opened the gate for him earlier in the day, that Charlie could hardly believe it was the same.

'Is it so very particular, then, what you have to say?' he asked.

'Very, sir, as you will be the first to admit when I tell you.'

'Let us go into the harness-room. There is a fire, and the men are sure to be away by this time.'

Charles led the way to the harness-room, opened the door and went in, the tramp following. Edward's saddle was drying before the fire on an old wooden case turned

upside down. Charlie removed the saddle, and told the tramp to take a rest on the box ; then he put a log on the fire and stirred it up. As he stooped to do this, his face came near the tramp's.

'You have been drinking,' he said sternly, turning round with the poker still in his hand.

'Yes, sir ; I had a glass of brandy, but not out of your money, for on my way to Peele I earned sixpence by helping a carter to get his cart out of a ditch. And if you are ever as tired and hungry and used up as I was this morning, you'll be glad of a drop of something to put a bit of life and courage into you. And I'd have no objection to another glass, if you'd give me one. Might a fellow smoke ?'

'Might a fellow smoke ! Do you know you are getting confoundedly familiar ? You have not only been drinking — you are drunk.'

'No, I am not. One glass of brandy does

not make a man like me drunk, and that is all I have had. As for familiarity, I have a right to be familiar.'

'You impertinent scoundrel! I've a good mind——'

'Don't use bad language, my dear sir. You'll be sorry for it afterwards.'

''Pon my word, this is intolerable! Say at once what you have to say, or I'll send for a constable.'

'I don't think you will, sir.'

'Why not? You are either an impostor or worse.'

'Well, perhaps I am—in one sense. All the same, don't you know me?'

'Know you? How on earth should I know you?'

'Look at me.'

The tramp rose, doffed his hat, removed the patch from his eye, and then threw back his head.

'Look!' he repeated.

Charles shook his head.

'By this fitful light,' he said, again stirring the fire—'by this fitful light I should not know my own brother.'

'I am your own brother.'

'My own brother! Good heavens! You don't mean to say you are Jack?'

'Yes, I am your vagabond, ne'er-do-weel brother—the same, though I can hardly believe it, who, when you were a little chap so high, used to romp with you in this very room, and ride you round the garden there on his back.'

Charlie's first impulse was to exclaim 'Dear old Jack!' and take his hand. Then, remembering the evil Jack had wrought—though he did not know the worst—he drew back.

'What are you doing here, and what has brought you to this pass?' he asked coldly.

'I will tell you. But not so loud, not so loud; the servants—somebody might hear. But let me ask you, first of all, did the governor square Peploe and Pope?'

'I believe so. At any rate, he paid a good deal of money!'

'Then they did not burst up? there was no scandal?'

'Peploe and Pope did not burst up; there was no scandal.'

'Then he must have squared them! I wonder how much it cost him. But did he square the bank as well?'

'What bank?'

'Jardine and Jameson.'

'I cannot tell you; I never heard of them before. Now, answer my questions—where have you been, and what do you want?'

'Where have I been? Well, when I found the game was up I jumped a ship——'

'You ran away from your debts, you mean? That was cowardly.'

'My debts? Yes, I ran away from my debts,' answered Jack, with a hard laugh, 'and a good job I did. I put on a suit of sailor clothes, went down to the docks, jumped

on board a ship as she was being towed out, got a berth as ordinary seaman, and sailed in her to China; and a rough voyage we had, I can tell you! At Hong-Kong I left her, and got a billet in a merchant's office; and if I had been a steady-going chap I might have saved money and got on. I did save some, but I spent it in a spree, and lost my billet at the same time. There was nothing for it but to go to sea again, so I shipped on board a brig bound to Queenstown for orders. We got orders to go on to Liverpool; and that being about the last place in the world I wanted to go to, I slipped overboard and swam ashore, and, as I had not a copper in my pocket and hardly a shirt to my back, I 'listed. By the time I had finished my drill the regiment was sent to Colchester, and there I got across with an infernal brute of a sergeant-major. One day last week he provoked me beyond endurance, and I knocked him down. I was placed under arrest, of course; but the

same night I escaped from the lock-up, went to a boozing ken, a common lodging-house, and exchanged clothes with a tramp while he slept, then set off on the tramp myself.'

'You are a deserter, then?'

'A deserter—and worse; he is——'

Jack seized the poker and sprang to his feet. Charlie turned sharply round. There was a dark figure in the doorway.

'You, Ned?' he exclaimed.

'Yes; you dropped this note in the hall, and recognising the handwriting, and guessing what had happened, I came here just in time to hear this vagabond's confession —or so much of it as he chooses to tell. —How dare you show your face here, Jack?'

'What is that to you, Ned? You are not my keeper. I have done you no harm.'

'Done me no harm! You have harmed us all. Are we not partners in your disgrace? To make good your defalcations

and prevent a frightful scandal, father had to borrow money and incur a liability which will hamper him as long as he lives. Is that no harm? Is it no harm to us—to Charlie and me—think you, that our eldest brother should be guilty of forgery and fraud, and become a drunkard, a deserter, and a tramp?'

'Forgery and fraud!' exclaimed Charlie. 'No, no, Ned! It is surely not so bad as that?'

'You were so young at the time that father did not want you to know; so, for God's sake, keep it to yourself! But it is true—ask him if it isn't.'

'It is true,' murmured Jack, bowing his head.

'And the bankers refused to be squared. If they find out that you are in the country they will prosecute you. Why on earth didn't you stay in China, or go somewhere else? If you possessed the slightest vestige of a conscience, you would have cut your

throat or blown out your brains rather than come back here.'

'Don't say that, Ned,' interrupted Charlie. 'It is almost as if you told him to commit murder. And he is our brother, after all. It is not for us to throw stones at him. If we don't forgive him, who will?'

'Well, I might have forgiven him if he had not come back. But this is the worst thing he has done yet. If he is taken up as a deserter—and he may be any moment, for I have not the least doubt the police are on the look-out for him—if he is taken he is sure to be recognised, and then—— It makes my very blood run cold to think of it! . . . What is your object in coming here, Jack? I suppose you have an object?'

'I thought I might get a little help. There's not a beggar on the road who is poorer than I am!'

'And you shall be helped, Jack,' broke in Charlie impetuously. 'I cannot do much, but whatever I can do I will.'

'He does not deserve to be helped, Charlie; and if it was not for the disgrace it would cause the family, I should say leave him to his fate.'

'No, you would not, Ned. When it came to the point, you would not have the heart to turn your own brother from your door without raising a hand to help him, though he is a black sheep.'

'You are right, Charlie,' said Jack gloomily. 'I am a black sheep, and I fear I always shall be; but is it entirely my own fault, think you? A man is pretty much as God makes him. At school I was always getting into scrapes; Ned was never in a scrape in his life. I could never do right, he could never do wrong; and it has been so ever since. How I wish my father had let me go to sea when I wanted! I should have got licked into shape while I was a cub. What was the use of trying to make a barrister of a fellow like me?'

'Not a word against the pater, Jack, if

you please,' said Charlie. 'He has been only too good.'

'I am not saying a word against him; merely expressing regret that I was not allowed to go to sea. I regret still more that he did not drown me while I was a whelp. I wish I had never been born. Don't you think I feel my degradation? Ned accused me of being a drunkard. I am not—at any rate, I am not a sot; but sometimes I get utterly reckless—I think of what I am, and what I might have been, and then I am ready for anything. I try to drown dark memories in drink—and, I won't deny it, the habit grows. . . . But I won't trouble you. Why should I? You are among the fortunate of the earth, while I, like Cain, am a vagabond on the face of it! Let me go. What though I am lagged? It will only be fifty lashes! I can stand that, and I did not enlist in my own name.'

'That would not do at all, Jack,' said Edward, speaking kindly for the first time.

'You would have to be brought before the bench, and somebody would be sure to recognise you ; and I cannot bear to think of you wandering about the country like a common tramp. Have you any money in your pocket, Charlie ?'

'Three or four sovereigns.'

'And I have no more.'

'That will do, thank you,' said Jack humbly. 'Five pounds will make me rich beyond the dreams of avarice.'

'No. You should have enough to take you out of this country, and start you in another—forty or fifty pounds at least—and you must be away from Peele before daylight to morrow—by the 5.30 train. . . . I have it. I am going to town to-morrow by the 10.30 express, *in re* Lincoln. I can get the money there, and you can meet me —it won't do for you to come to Wood's Hotel—at the Black Bull in Holborn, between five and six o'clock. Where will you go ?'

'To New York, in a sailing ship from the Thames. I must fight shy both of Liverpool and Queenstown.'

'You will really go, now? You won't spend the money in drink?'

'I assure you, Ned——'

'Well, it is your last chance, remember; and I don't mean to give you all this money at once. Fifteen pounds or so will be enough to keep you a few days in London and pay your passage in a sailing ship to New York. I will remit the balance to the care of some banker to wait your arrival. What may be your latest alias?'

'It was John Jones the other day. It is anything you like now.'

'Let it be grandfather's, then—Mark Darnley. And now we must go in, or we shall be missed. Charlie will bring you some clothes and a rug presently. You cannot go to London in those rags; and you must be off before the men come in the morning.'

'Couldn't I see him and my mother and ask their forgiveness? It might help me to do better.'

'No. It would be too cruel. It would reawaken painful memories; their hearts would bleed afresh; and—there are other reasons.'

The 'other reasons' were Edward's dread of a scene, and a fear that the scapegrace might obtain from his father a great deal more money than the modest sum which he himself proposed to give him.

'Anyhow, he may see them,' Charlie said. 'We have evening prayer about ten o'clock. When the stable clock strikes the hour go round to the dining-room window, Jack. I will arrange the blinds so that you can look in without being seen. But take care they don't see you. I will bring you the things as soon as I can, and I shall come again in the morning to see you off and say good-bye.'

When his brothers were gone, Jack put

his elbows on his knees and his head between his hands, and gazed gloomily at the flickering fire.

'Evening prayer! Evening prayer!' he moaned. 'They keep it up, then. How long is it since? To think of that time and what I am now is enough to make a fellow hang himself, as my dear brother advised me to do. How proud I was when mother took me in to prayers for the first time, and held me on her lap while father read! and then I would kneel at her side and say my own prayer, "God make me a good boy!" . . . Not much use, that prayer! He has made me a deuced bad boy—or the devil has—worse than I dare tell or anybody knows. . . . I'll ask Ned to pay my passage and see me safely on board. If he gives me all that money I shall go on the loose and get lagged, to a dead certainty. . . . They are very good, 'pon my soul! Charlie is really kind; he means it. Ned is good because he wants

to get rid of me. He is nothing if not respectable. Gad! if he saw me marched off with those things on my wrist, between a couple of fellows with fixed bayonets, he would have a fit. . . . I am on the down grade, and no mistake. If I could only keep off drink! Unless I do I shall go to the deuce fast, and utterly—faster, I dare say, in America than here. However, as nobody knows me there and nobody cares for me here, it don't much matter. Life is but a thought, and I have seen more of it than most men twice my age.'

And so his vagrant thoughts ran on until the clock struck ten. Then he went out and crept furtively, by well-known paths, to the dining-room window, and looked into the house from which he was an outcast, and might never enter again. The room was empty, but there presently came a servant and laid a Bible and a Prayer-Book on the table. Next a bell rang, and Mr. and Mrs. Prince and their two sons, followed

by several domestics, entered the room and took their places, just as they had done in days gone by. For the most of those present it was a ceremony without any particular meaning—Mr. Prince taking part in it mainly to please his wife, and because it was the right thing to do—but the vagabond's interest in it was intense; he lost neither a word nor a gesture; it was his last glimpse of home, the last time he should look on his father and mother, for whom, despite his sins and degradation, there was, deep down in his heart, an undying affection.

When Mr. Prince had read a few verses and a short prayer the servants withdrew, and Mrs. Prince, sitting down at the piano, asked her sons and her husband to join her in singing the old Evening Hymn:

> 'Glory to Thee, my God, this night,
> For all the blessings of the light;
> Keep me, oh, keep me, King of kings,
> Under Thine own almighty wings.'

When it was finished she rose from her seat.

'Are you going to bed already, mother?' asked Charlie.

'Yes, I feel rather tired.'

The two young men kissed her.

'Good-night, and may God bless you!' she said with emotion; 'and may He also bless poor erring Jack, wherever he is this night. I have thought much about him to-day.'

'Ay, God bless him!' added Mr. Prince, in a choking voice. 'He needs a blessing, if anybody does. It is nearly three years since his name passed my lips. He has done us a cruel wrong; but he is our own lad still. That is a fact one cannot blot out; and for aught we know he may be leading a better life. I often wonder where he is, and how occupied. All the same, I hope we may never hear of him again—unless it be something good. Better that he should perish in a foreign land than come back and disgrace us.'

All this fell on the listening vagabond's

ears and burnt into his soul. His whole body trembled with suppressed emotion, and his face was bathed with tears.

'I have their blessing,' he murmured; 'they love me still, drunken reprobate though I am. Please God, I'll never touch drink again; and when they hear of me it shall be something good—it shall—it shall!'

And then he crept back to his hiding-place, by the way he had come.

A few days later Jack was at sea, on board a ship bound for New York; and during the voyage, which was long and stormy, he never turned in without murmuring:

> 'Keep me, oh, keep me, King of kings,
> Under Thine own almighty wings,'

and saying to himself: 'It shall be something good, if I live.'

CHAPTER IX.

MRS. LINCOLN'S PLAN.

Though Mrs. Prince was neither a match-maker nor a schemer, it would have been strange if the idea of mating her son Edward with Olive Lincoln had not occurred to her. The advantages of such an alliance would have been obvious to a much less intelligent matron. Olive was an heiress, and albeit somewhat wayward and self-willed, a very charming girl; and Edward, who was a model son, could not fail to make an exemplary husband. Moreover, in the improbable event of the misappropriation of the trust-money coming to light, the fact of Olive being Edward's wife would disarm Mrs. Lincoln's resentment and prevent scandal. The secret

would be kept in the two families; and the intercourse between them had latterly become so frequent and friendly that she anticipated no difficulty in the realization of her designs. Formerly the Lincolns were generally from home—if they could be said to have a home—dividing their winters between Paris, Italy, and the Riviera, making occasional visits to America, and spending only their summers at All Hallows. But since Mr. Lincoln's death his widow and his daughter had lived there exclusively and in strict seclusion, making few calls, and receiving scarcely anybody save the Princes.

Mrs. Prince opened the campaign by sounding her son.

'Olive is a charming girl,' she said, 'and will make a very fine woman. Don't you think so?'

'Yes, I think she is. All the same, she would be more so if she were a little less wilful and capricious; and not being a prophet,

I am unable to say whether she will make a fine woman,' answered Edward, who (probably owing to his legal habit of mind) had a provoking way of never assenting to a proposition without cavilling.

'I did not say that she was faultless,' observed Mrs. Prince rather impatiently. 'A girl brought up as she has been is sure to be a little wilful; and she has seen so much of the world that she is older than her years. But I think I know her as well as you do, and I assure you she is a girl of noble nature, whose love any man might be proud to win.'

'Unquestionably—always of course, provided——'

'Oh, don't give me any of your "always provided." You need not talk to me as if you were afraid of committing yourself. I am very much in earnest. Tell me without equivocation whether you would not be proud to win her, whether the advantages, both to yourself personally and to the family, which

would accrue from a marriage with Olive, have not occurred to you ?'

'Of course they have, and as you press for an answer, I admit that I should be very glad ; but there are difficulties in the way which you do not seem to have taken into account.'

'What are they ?'

'Well, in the first place, I might have to keep her.'

'Naturally, but as you have now a share in the office, and as she is an heiress, that is surely not much of a difficulty.'

'You forget that Mr. Lincoln, in his will, expressed a strong desire, amounting almost to a command, that his daughter should not marry until she was at least twenty-one ; and in the event of her marrying without her guardian's consent before she is twenty-five, the whole of her fortune, except two hundred a year, goes to another branch of the family (after her mother's death), a provision intended, no doubt, to prevent

her being snapped up by a mere fortune-hunter.'

'But her guardians have nothing against you?'

'Perhaps not, but they would certainly object to her marrying before she comes of age. In no case can she touch a penny of her fortune pending that event, and my share in the business would not enable me to give her such an establishment as she has a right to expect. Besides, I know for a fact that Mrs. Lincoln would object to any engagement whatever during Olive's minority. She would regard it as a violation of the spirit, if not the letter, of her husband's injunction; and in my opinion it would be impolitic even to raise the question.'

'That does make a difference, certainly,' said Mrs. Prince pensively. 'All the same, I do not see why you should not make yourself agreeable to Olive in the meantime. There are a hundred ways in which a young

man may let a girl know that he loves her, without actually proposing. And the sooner you begin the better, for though Olive is fancy-free now, she is at an impressionable age, and there is no knowing how long she may remain so. It will be quite enough to propose in two years or so, and, if you have secured her affection in the meantime, I am sure Mrs. Lincoln would not object. Why should she? Where will she find a man more likely to make Olive happy?'

'All very well, but suppose I fall in love with Olive and she does not reciprocate—how then?'

'That is a risk you must run, my dear, and remember that "faint heart never won fair lady."'

'I don't think I have a faint heart, mother, though I do confess to a cautious temperament. And, to tell the truth, I have begun your plan already; I have tried to make myself agreeable to Olive, as yet,

however, without much tangible success. I seem to get no "forruder." She gives me the go-by for Charlie, and, do you know, I have sometimes had a suspicion that those two are slightly spoons on each other. Has that possibility entered into your calculations, mater ?'

Mrs. Prince laughed.

'You are really too absurd with your doubts and suspicions and misgivings, Edward. Mentally Charlie is little more than a boy. They saw a good deal of each other when they were children; that is the reason why they are so friendly. Besides, he is both too young and too much taken up with hunting and that to fall in love. He thinks more of Kitty than Olive, and he is not Olive's ideal. These Americans are very practical. Mrs. Lincoln is a farmer's daughter, and Mr. Lincoln made his own way. They think nothing of a man who does not put all his energies into his profession and make money. I do wish

father would insist on his spending more time at the office.'

'Charlie is a lad after father's own heart,' answered Edward with a supercilious smile.

'Yes; he says he was much the same at the same age, and that Charlie will buckle to when he has had his fling. We shall see. . . . You will think of what I have said, dear?'

'I will, mother; and, to be quite open with you, I care for Olive very much—perhaps more than, considering the circumstances and having regard to my own peace of mind, is quite prudent—and I am glad you think I have a chance.'

'A chance! You have every chance—good looks, a good position, good manners, a stainless character, a fair future and no rivals: what could you want more?'

If Mrs. Prince had known that at the very time she and Edward were concocting this ingenious scheme for the capture of Olive's heart Mrs. Lincoln was beginning

to question whether it was not in danger from another quarter, the former lady might have seen reason to modify her opinions and revise her plans. Mrs. Lincoln could have told her that, despite Charlie's faults and the other's virtues, Olive's preference was for the younger and (matrimonially) less eligible brother.

Nevertheless, Mrs. Lincoln had no reason to suppose that her daughter's happiness was compromised as yet, much less that Charlie had spoken words of love; but young people were young people, and the latent spark might easily be kindled into a flame which it would be difficult, perhaps impossible, to control. This contingency Mrs. Lincoln greatly deprecated. Even though Charlie were a desirable *parti*, it would be her duty to respect her husband's wishes as well in the spirit as the letter, and the surest way of doing so would be to prevent Olive from forming any attachment whatever for several years to come.

On the other hand, it would be the height of indiscretion to talk to Olive in this strain, or warn her against Charlie. Indeed, Mrs. Lincoln shrewdly suspected that she had talked too much about that young gentleman already, and that her somewhat exaggerated reflections on his faults, instead of making her daughter think worse of him, had made her think better of him.

Had it not been for the exigencies of the lawsuit, the difficulty might easily have been got over by a voyage to America or a trip to the Continent. But neither of these expedients being admissible, she adopted a third, which, as she believed, would prove equally effective.

This was to renounce the seclusion in which she had lived since her husband's death, entertain freely, and encourage the visits of young men and maidens, who might, she hoped, prove a counter-attraction to Charlie.

As a beginning, she resolved to give a

breakfast to the hunt, of which the late Mr. Lincoln, though he never rode to hounds, had been a liberal supporter.

Mr. Prince, who thought she had mourned quite long enough, and delighted in anything which gave *éclat* to the noble sport which the famous Mr. Jorrocks happily described as the image of war, without its guilt and only twenty-five per cent. of its danger, warmly approved of his client's design, and rendered her every help in his power. Negotiations were opened with the master and secretary of the hunt, and a fortnight later the local papers announced that the Riversdale Hounds would meet at All Hallows on the following Monday at 10.30 (for breakfast). The words in brackets, it is hardly necessary to observe, referred exclusively to the biped members of the hunt, the dietary of hounds on hunting days being strictly limited to fox—when they can catch one.

The occasion afforded a fine opening for Edward Prince. He was a good caterer

an adept in the management of picnics, outings, and parties, and made himself very useful to the ladies of the house. Mrs. Lincoln left all the details to him, and the butler and the cook were ordered to place themselves at his disposal. The result justified her confidence: the breakfast was all that could be desired, and Edward won great praise.

On the eventful morning All Hallows, a fine old country house, commanding a wide prospect of green valley and sylvan heights, was as merry as a fair. Gay cavaliers were cantering across the park, dashing dog-carts driving up the avenue, hounds reposing on the lawn, led horses pacing to and fro before the house. The portico, the hall, and the dining-room were ablaze with scarlet, and brilliant with white breeches, shining boots, and resplendent spurs. The gathering was large, for Mrs. Lincoln had invited several of her neighbours to see the show, and some had come to breakfast whose hunting

would be finished when the first fox broke cover.

At one end of the principal table sat Mr. Prince (who was doing the honours for Mrs. Lincoln), at the other Bertie Harden, the master of the hounds and the captain of the county eleven, a long-limbed, broad-shouldered gentleman, whose handsome face was radiant with health and high spirits. as well it might be, seeing that its owner hunted four days a week in winter, played cricket as often in summer, and between whiles did a fair amount of shooting and fishing. The banquet was graced with the presence of several elderly ladies and a few fair girls; and Olive's bright eyes, scarlet jacket, and broad-brimmed low-crowned hat, turned the heads of at least half a dozen of the younger members of the hunt.

Time being limited, everybody worked at high speed, and most of the guests, so soon as they had finished, gave place to late-comers, who had not been fortunate enough

to find seats. Among them was Charlie, but while the majority of the others went out of the room he went no further than the back of Olive's chair—a fact which did not escape the notice either of his brother or Mrs. Lincoln.

When the clock on the mantelpiece cuckooed eleven, the master stood up and signified that he had something to say. But his erstwhile radiant face had become pathetically solemn, for speech-making was more abhorrent to him than a dodging fox or a hard frost, and even his warmest friends were fain to admit that oratory was not his forte.

'Ladies and gentlemen,' he began in faltering accents, 'ladies and gentlemen, I have to thank you—no, I don't—I mean that it would not be right for us to separate without expressing our high sense of Mrs. Lincoln's kindness in inviting the Riversdale Hounds to breakfast this morning, and on their behalf——'

'"Is thy servant a dog that he should do this thing?"' interrupted the waggish secretary in a *sotto voce* sufficiently audible to set the table in a roar.

'Hang it, Winterbrook, don't cross a fellow in that way!' exclaimed the master with a bewildered look, and pulling up short. 'What the dickens——? Ah, I see, I must hark back. I beg your pardon, ladies and gentlemen, hounds was a slip—I meant members of the hunt——'

'Gad! I think the hounds are the most important members of the hunt,' muttered the irrepressible secretary.

'If you don't shut up, Bob, I shall. On behalf of the hunt, I thank Mrs. Lincoln for her hospitality, also for the interest she takes in our sport. Her covers are always a sure find. Charlie Prince, who has almost as keen a nose for his namesake as a veteran hound, tells me that an uncommonly fine fox was seen in Whitethorn Wood this morning. I hope he is there yet, and will

give us a good run. Gentlemen, fill your glasses, and join me in drinking the healths of our highly-respected hostess and her lovely daughter.'

Mrs. Lincoln bowed, Olive smiled and blushed, and after the healths had been drunk Mr. Prince responded in a neat little speech, which was very much applauded. He had scarcely sat down when a sporting farmer, whose breeches and boots looked as if they had been heirlooms in his family for several generations, went up to the master and whispered something in his ear.

'Gentlemen,' said Mr. Harden excitedly, 'a fox, probably the fox I alluded to just now, was viewed away from Whitethorn Wood ten minutes ago. If the hounds are laid on at once we may have a good run. Perhaps Mrs. Lincoln will kindly excuse us.'

The words were hardly out of his mouth when there was a general stampede for the door; and the next moment men were rushing wildly about in all directions, looking

for their horses, calling for their grooms, and mounting in hot haste.

Charlie leant over to Olive.

'Let us mount quickly in the stable yard, and get out the back way,' he said. 'Come.'

CHAPTER X.

WELL SAVED.

Olive followed her pilot, and their horses, which had been waiting on the pillar reins, were brought out at once. Daisy being amiss, Miss Lincoln was going to ride a thoroughbred chestnut, belonging to a dealer, which her mother had promised to buy for her if he behaved to her satisfaction.

Charlie had tried the animal a few days previously, and pronounced him to be a fine goer and a good jumper.

'But you will have to be careful at first,' he said, as they rode out of the yard. 'He is quiet enough by himself, but he may get excited with hounds, and chestnuts are sometimes rather hot.'

'Oh, I think I can manage him. He seems very gentle, and you will keep near me, won't you?'

'Of course I shall. Don't I always?'

Olive smiled. She was quite conscious of the fact that Charlie generally did keep near her, whether they were in the hunting field or elsewhere.

The 'back way' was a short-cut which brought them to Whitethorn Wood in advance of the crowd, and just as the hounds were laid on. But the scent had grown cold almost to nothingness, and as Quickly, the huntsman, did not believe in pottering about to no purpose, he blew his horn and went off at a canter to Lorton Springs, a cover about two miles distant, which was probably the fox's point. The way thither led across some large grass fields and through a line of gates.

So far the chestnut, which rejoiced in the name of Rataplan, had been quite under control, but with the hounds before him, and

a hurrying crowd of horses behind him, he grew excited and began to pull.

'Not so fast, Olive,' said the watchful Charlie; 'if he gets fairly into his stride you won't be able to stop him.'

'I am doing my best,' returned Olive, straining at the bridle; 'but the harder I pull the faster he goes.'

Right before them was a ditch, bounded on the further side by a quickthorn hedge, which, though high, seemed too thin to be either difficult or dangerous; but Charlie knew it of old.

'This way,' he said; 'there is a gate yonder, and that hedge is topped with wire; it would be certain grief.'

'He will neither stop nor turn,' cried the girl, tugging at the reins with all her might.

Charlie rode close up to her, and, seizing the bridle, tried to pull the horse round. He might as well have tried to turn a steam engine. Rataplan had got his head down,

and had evidently made up his mind to charge the bullfinch.

'He will come an awful cropper! You must get off, Olive. Quick! slip your foot out of the stirrup; see that your skirt is clear, and when I put my arm round your waist, throw yours round my neck. Now!'

The next moment Olive was on Kitty's back and in Charlie's arm, and as the young fellow turned his mare from the fence, Rataplan rose at it; but he was going too fast to jump high, and hitting the almost invisible wire with his forelegs, made a complete somersault in the air, and landed in the next field on his back.

'Dear Olive, thank God you are safe!' exclaimed Charlie passionately.

'And I owe my life to you.'

'It was nothing. Any other fellow would have done the same.'

'But no other fellow did; and oh, Charlie, I would rather owe my life to you than anybody else in all the world!'

Her face was very pale, but her eyes were bright, and there was a light in them which Charlie had never seen before.

Just then the secretary and several other men, who had observed the incident from a distance, galloped up to offer their help. The secretary jumped from his horse and helped Olive, who was half fainting, to the ground.

'That was a deuced near thing, and very well saved!' he exclaimed. 'The beggar bolted, I suppose. Take a drink from my flask, Miss Lincoln; it will do you good.'

Olive drank and felt better. Meanwhile Macadam and the butcher, who had scrambled through the bullfinch, shouted that Rataplan was all right—he had fallen in a soft place—and they would lead him round to the gate.

'But you will surely not ride that bolting beggar again, Miss Lincoln,' put in the secretary. 'He may bolt when Charlie Prince is somewhere else, and you would be in the wrong box then.'

'She shall have Kitty, and I will ride Rataplan,' said Charlie; 'then she won't lose the day's sport.'

'But won't he bolt with you?' asked Olive anxiously.

'I think I can hold him; I am a little stronger than you,' smiling. 'Besides, that tumble will have taken the devil out of him.'

It seemed so, for when the butcher brought him round to the gate the horse looked as quiet as a lamb.

The saddles were changed, and the secretary, who was the pink of politeness where ladies were concerned, having helped Olive up, they resumed their interrupted journey.

Presently Edward overtook them, looking not very happy. Albeit he had resolved not to lose sight of Olive, even though he should break his neck, he had made a bad start, owing to the temporary disappearance of the rustic to whom he had entrusted his

horse, and if the hounds had found at the first draw would have been left hopelessly behind. When he heard that Charlie had saved Olive from a great danger—probably from death—by a brilliant feat of horsemanship, he did not feel any happier. Nevertheless, he could not help congratulating her and complimenting him—in a fashion.

'I hope you have quite recovered from the shock, Miss Lincoln,' he said, with slightly exaggerated anxiety.

'Quite, thank you; but I confess that when I saw that wire, and Rataplan would not stop, I was horribly frightened.'

'Of course you were; I should have been myself,' returned Edward sympathetically. 'It was very well done of my brother, very well done. How fortunate he was with you! All the same, Charlie, I am rather surprised you did not discover that the horse was a bolter when you tried him the other day.'

'When I tried him the other day he was

as easy to hold as a parson's hack. You forget, too, that Bristowe said he was quiet with hounds and a perfect lady's hunter. Besides, I am by no means sure that the horse is a bolter. He was very fresh, and when he heard the field clattering behind him got excited. Exercise him regularly, and ride him to hounds twice a week, and he will be as safe a mount as Daisy.'

Olive was about to say that Charlie had acted nobly, and to protest that he deserved unqualified praise, when a thought, suggested by a new-born prudence, arrested the words on her lips, and, turning to Edward, she inquired how he had left his mother, rather to his bewilderment. But as he always assumed —unless there was strong evidence to the contrary—that other people took him as seriously as he took himself, he answered with becoming gravity that his mother, though not fully recovered from her cold, was much better.

When they reached Lorton Springs the

hounds were 'blown out.' Reynard was not there. After a word with the master, Quickly led the eager pack to a third cover, Raklow Park, at so fast a pace that the hindmost hunters imagined that the hounds were running, and did not discover their mistake until they overtook the main body.

A big cover was the so-called park, with deep winding rides, and so difficult to get away from that even hard riders were sometimes left lamenting in the fastnesses of its impenetrable thickets.

By the advice of the urbane secretary, who, having been brought up in the way he should go, knew every brake and bush in the country, Olive, the Princes, and several others took up a strategic position at the north-east corner of the cover.

'Here,' he said, 'we command a view of two sides. Whether the fox breaks this way or that, we shall see him. If he breaks yonder we shall hear the whip's view hallo ;

if on the other side, Quickly's horn. Now, silence in the ranks, if you please.'

The secretary's prescience was justified by the event.

'What is that, Charlie?' asked Olive, a few minutes later, pointing to a dark object which was gliding across a stubble field some two or three hundred yards from where they stood.

'That is the fox, Miss Lincoln,' answered the secretary. 'He has stolen out of the cover unbeknown, as Mrs. Gamp would say. But keep quiet until he is fairly away, or those loitering fools in that old lane will either head him back or get before the hounds.'

But when Reynard was in the next field and had put a brook with rotten banks between himself and the 'loitering fools' in question, the secretary and Charlie gave a series of view hallos that made the horses prick their ears, and nearly frightened to death a poor hare which had been hiding in

her form. Before the echo of them died away, Quickly, followed by his pack, leaped from the wood, and soon the baying of the hounds proclaimed that the chase had begun.

'Over the brook by the bridge,' said Charlie, leading the way. 'We shall nick in on the other side.'

Which they did, just as the hounds, closely followed by the master and Quickly (who had done the brook despite its rotten bank), were streaming over a big pasture, bounded by a flight of posts and rails, which was easily done by the timber jumpers; the others rode for a gate.

For fifteen minutes or so the pace was fast and furious; then, after a short check, it became slower, yet not too slow for enjoyment—more enjoyable, indeed, for folks who liked to look about them and had an eye for the picturesque.

They were in the best of the Riversdale country, a country which, though mostly

under plough, rode light and carried a good scent, slightly undulating, and intersected with ditches so wide that the man and horse who went in were seen no more until they got out—yet quite practicable for resolute jumpers and riders of nerve. No use looking for gaps or riding for places ; those who did not take things as they came had to stop behind or make ignobly for the nearest road.

As the chase swept on, the sun, which had been hiding all the morning, came out nobly, investing the far-away hills and brightening the brown fields and dark woodlands with the wondrous witchery of his smile ; and all this beauty, blending with the sights and sounds of sylvan war, red coats and galloping horses, the cries of men, and the music of hounds, gladdened still more the two young souls who had just made the supreme discovery of their lives—that they loved and were loved.

They talked in snatches ; it is not easy to

keep up a conversation when hounds are running.

'Are you enjoying it, Olive?' he asked.

'Can you ask? So much!'

'You look so. Your eyes are as bright as the sun.'

'Oh, Charlie! But mind what you say; somebody might—and your brother is close behind. How well he is going!'

Edward was going well. He had made up his mind to keep close to Olive, and as he was riding the cleverest horse in his father's stud he had no difficulty in sticking to his resolve. He had only to stick on, and though he had no stomach for the sport, and never took a jump without fearing a fall, the thought that he was gaining credit with Miss Lincoln for his bold riding and preventing her from getting too thick with Charlie steeled his nerve and converted what would otherwise have been a penance into the semblance of a pleasure.

After a run of two hours, the latter part

of it rather dragging, the fox was handsomely killed in the open, and the brush awarded to Miss Lincoln. Then the hounds went further afield to draw again ; but as Olive said she was tired, and Charlie declared that Rataplan had had enough, and Edward said he had, they decided to hie them home, as did most of the others who had no second horses out.

Olive rode between the brothers, and was very gracious to Edward, complimenting him warmly on his riding, though not quite as judiciously as she might have done.

'You went as well as anybody,' she said. 'With a little more practice you will soon be as good a man with hounds as Charlie.'

'It is very kind of you to say so, Miss Lincoln, but I am sure I shall never be Charlie's equal in horsemanship. He gives his mind to it ; I don't,' answered Edward in a tone which implied that he held horsemanship in light esteem.

'Well, if you want to excel in anything

you must give your mind to it, mustn't you? You give your mind to law, therefore you excel as a lawyer. But would it not be possible for a man to excel in both?—like your father, for instance.'

'I am not sure that my father does excel as a lawyer. But there were no examinations in his time. He owes his success rather to native shrewdness, sound judgment, and capacity for business than profound knowledge.'

'No matter, he excels. And you forget his high sense of honour and his pleasantly genial manner, so important in a lawyer.'

'It is not for me to praise my father, Miss Lincoln; but you are quite right. Character and a manner which inspires confidence are more essential to success—at any rate, in a country lawyer—than mere knowledge of the law,' he answered, wondering at the same time what she would say if she were to know about the broken trust.

Charlie listened in silence, but he guessed that some of Olive's remarks were intended for him.

'She wants me to take the pater for my example,' he thought, 'and I will.'

The brothers saw Olive home.

'I am sorry I cannot ask you to stay,' she said, as they reined up at the door; 'my mother has gone to town and won't be back till dinner-time. Will you change saddles here, Charlie?'

'No, I will ride round to the stables. You go on, Ned; I'll overtake you before you get to the lodge-gates.'

Whereupon, after shaking hands with the two cavaliers and bidding them good-night, Miss Lincoln tripped into the house.

As Charlie was mounting his horse in the stable yard a man put a note into his hand.

'From Miss Olive,' he said.

It contained these words:

'At four to-morrow afternoon, in the King's Path.'

CHAPTER XI.

THEIR FIRST TRYST.

On the next day Charlie was early at the office, and, having an object in view, worked with unwonted diligence. He drafted a rather complicated lease so well that Lilly-white declared he could not have done it better himself, and Mr. Prince said the same.

Shortly before three o'clock Charlie, having finished his lease, went into his father's room.

'I am going to Fountains,' he said; 'one of the chimneys is in a very bad way, and Pringle wants somebody to look at it.'

'Yes, you had better; but take care what you promise. If we let the account

for disbursements get too high, we shall have his lordship complaining again. I suppose you will be back in time to go home with us in the dog-cart?'

'No, I think I shall walk home by the fields. One gets so little walking in the hunting season.'

'Anyhow, you won't be late for dinner?'

'Trust me for that! I have always a frightful appetite the day after hunting.'

Fountains was a farmhouse in the neighbourhood of All Hallows, and thither, after leaving the office, the young fellow went with swift strides. The chimney was, of course, only a pretext. A few days previously he had met Mr. Pringle 'promiscuous in the street,' when that gentleman casually observed that his kitchen-chimney was tumbling down, and suggested that the 'mending of it' was rather a landlord's job than a tenant's.

Pringle seemed surprised that Charlie had taken his joke seriously, and, after showing

him the chimney and his prize bullocks, invited him to step inside and have a glass of home-brewed. Charlie being, as he said, pressed for time, prayed to be excused, and, after taking leave of the farmer, made a bee-line for All Hallows, whistling blithely as he crossed the fields, vaulting all the gates, and feeling generally as though he were walking in air. For was he not going to his first love tryst? Little recked the high-spirited lad just then of prudence and caution, of impending difficulties and possible trials.

'Olive! Olive! Dear Olive! She loves me! she loves me!' was his sole thought, a thought which quenched every doubt and silenced every misgiving.

And was it not better so? Youth is the time of illusion and love, the time when life seems endless and the future has no terrors. Let those to whom it is given enjoy it while they may.

As Charlie drew near All Hallows he sobered down somewhat, and looked sharply

about him. The house, which occupied the site of an ancient hunting-lodge built by Henry VIII., stood on the brow of a gentle acclivity, overlooking a spacious park, dotted with noble trees and begirt with broad woodlands. The King's Path (so called after the much-married monarch), where Olive had asked Charlie to meet her, was a sequestered walk winding between laurel bushes and leading to a small lake, nestling in a grove of copper beeches and weeping willows, invisible from the house.

Though the time was winter, the weather was mild and the air balmy. The setting sun was raining gold on Whitethorn Wood, and as he sank below the horizon a crescent moon mirrored itself in the still waters of the tiny lake.

It was an ideal trysting-place.

Charlie, guessing that Olive did not want him to venture too near the house, leaned against the bole of a lordly beech-tree and waited. He was too happy to be impatient,

and his thoughts were of the pleasantest, and he knew she would come.

Presently a light hand touched him on the shoulder. While he was looking one way, Olive had come another, and the soft carpet of fallen leaves had deadened her footsteps.

'Dear Olive! How good of you to come!' he exclaimed, turning to her. He would have clasped her in his arms, but young love is often timid, and not yet daring to do more, he took both her hands. 'Dear Olive! How good of you to come!' he repeated ardently.

'I am not sure that it is quite right, but after yesterday it seemed necessary to have an explanation — I feared you would be committing some imprudence, and there may be no other opportunity for a long time. But first of all let me thank you again for saving me from a danger which, if it had not been my death, would almost certainly have made me a cripple for life. I

am really very grateful, Charlie ; so is my mother, as she will tell you when you call. How can I thank you enough ?'

'By letting me kiss you and saying you love me.'

Then Charlie, taking silence for consent, and growing bolder, drew her to him and looked into her love-bright eyes, and took love's tribute from her yielding lips.

'You love me ?' he said, still holding her in his arms.

'Do you think I should be here if I did not ?' she returned with a happy laugh. 'But until yesterday I knew not myself how much. I thought my affection for you was no more than sisterly. But when I felt that I was safe in your arms, and I looked up at your face, and heard you call me "dear Olive," it was like a revelation. I learnt the truth. What did I say ? I am afraid it was something very foolish.'

'That you would rather I had saved you than anybody else ; which meant, I thought,

that you loved me better than anybody else.'

'You might have made a worse guess, my Prince. But it must be all love, remember.'

'Naturally, my sweet Olive. Is not Love lord of all?'

'I did not mean in that sense, you foolish boy! I meant that we must not be engaged.'

'In love and not engaged! How can that be, Olive? You talk in riddles. What is the difference?'

'Immense. We cannot help being in love—love comes of itself; but we may help being engaged! In the one case we can keep it to ourselves; in the other we should have to tell everybody. You would have to ask my mother's consent, which you would not get, and tell your own people, and that might lead to trouble.'

'So you think your mother would not consent?'

'I am sure. My father disapproved of early marriages. I am forbidden to marry before I am twenty-one, and my mother disapproves of long engagements, and I fear she would also disapprove of you.'

'Personally, do you mean?'

'Personally, in the sense that she thinks that you take life too easily and your character is unformed. But that is not the point. She would not consent to an engagement now, though you were all she could wish; and if you were to ask and be refused you could not come any more to our house; we should not be allowed to meet, and that would not be nice; and if I marry without the consent of my guardians, who would, of course, be guided by my mother, I forfeit my fortune.'

'I don't care anything about your fortune.'

'But I do. I have heard my father say that only fools despise money, and I think he was right. It would be dreadful to

marry on narrow means. Fancy not being able to buy pictures and have things, and go on the Continent or to America whenever you wanted! You must let it be as I say, if you please, dear.'

'I see,' said Charlie thoughtfully; 'we are to regard ourselves as being in love, but not engaged. Being in love is a state of mind; an engagement is a quasi-contract. But how long?'

'Until I am of age. I shall be eighteen next month.'

'So long?'

'Well, perhaps my mother might consent to our being engaged when I am twenty, or so—if you wish it very much, and please her in the meantime. But what does it matter so long as we love each other?' Engaged couples are so stupid. Three months will be quite long enough to be ridiculous. And there is another reason for not saying anything—Edward.'

'I think I know what you mean. I

have had the same idea myself. You think he is in love with you, then ?'

'I think he is very much in love with my fortune, and perhaps a little with myself. Dear Charlie, I love you, I adore your father and mother, but I am not enamoured of your brother, and if he knew that I prefer you to him I am sure he would make trouble.'

'I dare say he would try. Well, we must keep him in the dark—as long as we can. I say, Olive, what a wise little head you have got !'

'It is an American head, Charlie ; that is the reason. Now, you must promise not to be jealous if I seem to prefer Edward to you sometimes, and let other men pay me little attentions—only, of course, to hoodwink the censorious and suspicious.'

'All right ! I promise. Am I to consider myself at liberty to pay little attentions to other girls—to hoodwink the suspicious, you know ?'

'Certainly not. The idea! Other girls, indeed! All you have to do is not to pay me marked attention in public, or look at me too often or too ardently. If you do I shall flirt outrageously, so mind.'

And then, as if to enforce the admonition, she gave him a playful tap on the cheek, which Charlie resented, as a Christian should, with a kiss.

'But surely, Olive, you will meet me here sometimes, or elsewhere?' he said ruefully.

'If you are good and discreet, and if we play our parts properly and keep them in the dark, we shall have many opportunities of exchanging a word. So long as we don't seem to care for each other you will be a welcome guest at All Hallows. And now I am going to read you a lecture. You won't be vexed?'

Charlie warmly protested that he would not be vexed whatever she said, and putting

his arm round her waist and taking one of her hands in his, he bade her begin.

'You are a foolish boy,' she said, smiling and nestling up to him, 'and I have a great mind to——'

'What?'

'Leave you right away. Let me go.'

'Not until I have had my lecture.'

'We will take that as read, then, as they do at meetings,' she said with a smile. 'You had the substance of it as we rode home after that good run with the harriers. But then I was talking to you merely as a friend, rather telling you what my mother said than I myself thought; and perhaps she exaggerated, hoping thereby to make me think less of you.'

'And she did not succeed.'

'No, dear. All the same, I want my mother and my people in New England to think well of you, when they know; and if they hear that you are merely a lawyer's clerk, and that you give all your energy and

your time to sport, I am afraid it will be just the other way. In America—I mean in New England, for I know nothing of the South—everybody works, the rich as well as the poor. My mother says she would not give a fig for the man who has no occupation, or who, having one, does not put all his energies into it. You have now a great chance of securing yourself in her good opinion. She is grateful for what you did yesterday, and thinks even that there is some advantage in fine horsemanship. It is not a question of money. You will have some ; I shall have a great deal ; it is a question of having a purpose. And I need not say how anxious I am that my Prince should be well thought of by all who are dear to me.'

'Is that all?' asked Charlie, after a minute's thought.

'Yes, I have said my say.'

'And a very good say, too! What terribly earnest people they must be in

New England! and I really don't see the good of being rich if you have to work as hard as if you were poor. However, I am not rich, and I quite agree with you that I ought to work harder than I have done. I knew that you would expect me to turn over a new leaf, and I began this morning, and did so well as to win high praise both from my father and Lillywhite. And I mean to go on. I will win your mother's good opinion, and when you meet your toiling kinsfolk in New England you shall have no reason to be ashamed of your young man. For the remainder of the season I shall hunt only two days a week. I am through with my articles. Next year my father will give me a small interest, and I shall become a member of the firm. As for a purpose, I have a threefold purpose—to be as smart a lawyer as Ned, as honourable a gentleman as my father, and to make myself worthy of the love of the best and dearest and sweetest girl in the world.'

'Oh, Charlie, you have made me so happy!' she cried joyously. 'And you are so clever that you can be anything you like.'

'Didn't you know that before?'

'I knew you were good and brave, but I was not so sure about the cleverness. And afterwards—my fortune will be yours, you know—you must run for Parliament—I am sure you could get in for Peele—you must run for Parliament and become a great statesman—perhaps Prime Minister.'

'Hadn't I better go to America, and run for the Presidency?'

'You couldn't. You are not a born American. You might become a citizen and go into Congress. But no, that would not be good enough; the best people don't go into Congress; our politicians, I am sorry to say, are for the most part scallawags.'

'That sounds very dreadful, dear, though I have not the least idea what it is. Still,

on the whole, I think I would rather be an English Premier than an American scallawag. I once thought of being a general; in dreams I have been an M.F.H. But I dare say the Premiership would suit me almost as well. Yes, I decide for the Premiership.'

After the laugh which this sally provoked had subsided, and Olive had observed that more unlikely things had happened, she bethought her that it was time for them to part. Her mother would be wondering where she was, and if she should send one of the maids to look for her, the result would be too awful to contemplate. Charlie appreciated too keenly the necessity of prudence to press his sweetheart to prolong her stay.

He went with her to a point where the path bent towards the house—she would not let him go farther, for fear he should be seen—and there they parted as lovers, engaged or otherwise, are wont to part.

Charlie jumped no gates as he wended homewards, for, though happy and exultant, his exultation was not altogether free from apprehension. He had accepted new responsibilities, and the position of an accepted yet unbetrothed lover was not entirely to his mind. And if Ned were kept in the dark and Olive led him to think that he was not indifferent to her, he would have just cause for complaint, and when he knew the truth there would be a bitter quarrel, much unpleasantness, and, perhaps, lifelong enmity between his brother and himself, to the great distress of his father and mother. The possibility was undeniable, and Charlie could not help asking himself whether it would not be better for him and Olive to avow their love and take the consequences. But Olive thought differently; her will was his law, and when he remembered that the avowal would be followed by an interdict on their love-making, and probably by Mrs. Lincoln's departure from the neighbourhood,

he felt that he had not the courage to advise or adopt so bold a course.

'There will be a row in any case,' he soliloquized. 'What is the good of meeting it half-way? If we can put it off a couple of years, that will be so much to the good.'

'How about Pringle's chimney?' asked his father, when they met at dinner.

'I had my walk for nothing. The chimney only wanted pointing and a new pot, and Pringle had it done himself.'

'Just like Pringle; he always calls out before he is hurt.'

'Pringle! You must have been close to All Hallows. Did you call?' asked Edward suspiciously.

'No. But I suppose it will be our duty to call in the course of the week. Will you go with me?'

Edward would rather have gone alone, but, seeing that if he went alone Charlie would go alone, he said 'Yes,' and it was

agreed that they should call on the following Thursday.

Both he and his mother had been a good deal exercised in mind by Charlie's rescue of Olive.

'I am glad he showed so much courage and presence of mind, and it is a mercy dear Olive was not killed,' said Mrs. Prince. 'But I wish you had been the rescuer. It is just the sort of thing that makes an impression on a young girl's mind—dramatic and romantic and that. However, as Charlie cares nothing about girls, and is not her ideal, I don't think any harm has been done. But you should lose no opportunity of paying Olive delicate little attentions, and letting her see that she is not indifferent to you.'

Whatever misgivings Edward might have had were set at rest by his visit to All Hallows. Mrs. Lincoln thanked Charlie warmly for his rescue of Olive, and complimented him greatly on his gallantry, and

while he talked with the mother Edward talked with the daughter, who seemed pleased with his company, and was more gracious to him than she had ever been before. But while her smiles were for him, the responsive pressure of her hand was for Charlie, and both brothers went away happy —the one in the belief that he had made an impression, the other in the assurance that he was the favoured swain.

As, owing to bad weather and stress of circumstances, the King's Path was not always available, the lovers had to do most of their courting in the hunting-field. It was the only place where they could talk freely; and as Mrs. Lincoln had asked Charlie to act as her daughter's pilot, he was doing no more than his duty in looking after her. Nevertheless, when Edward was out, she rather affected his company, and gave him frequent opportunity of paying her those little attentions to which his mother attached so much importance. This was

generally when they were riding to the meet or drawing the first cover ; for after the fox went away he had to give place to his younger brother, and as often as not was either left behind or thrown out, the result being that three times out of four Olive and Charlie found themselves together at the close of the day, and had a delightful ride home together. On the whole, however, Edward was well satisfied with the way in which things were shaping. The hunting season would not last for ever, and when it was over his innings would begin. Meanwhile, as the result of close observation, he had arrived at three very definite and comforting assurances—that his attentions were beginning to tell ; that Olive's liking for Charlie, never more than a feeling of *camaraderie*, was fast changing into indifference ; and that Charlie had not yet turned his thoughts to love. Rather was he turning them to business—buckling to, as his father and Lillywhite always said he

would—and working almost as industriously as his elders.

From all of which it may be inferred that the lovers were playing their parts well. They, too, were satisfied; so were Mrs. Lincoln and Mrs. Prince—the one because she felt sure that her fears touching the relations of her daughter and Charlie were groundless; the other because she was equally confident that her plan for a marriage between Olive and Edward was working to a successful issue.

CHAPTER XII.

THROWN OUT.

It was one of the last days of the season; the winter was past, and Spring was coming forth in all her glory. The erstwhile dark wheat-fields had donned their livery of green; farmers were busy harrowing their meadows and making up their fences; hedgerows were beginning to bud, birds to build their nests, and gentlemen-foxes to ramble from their native wilds and be out o' nights.

It was one of the last days of the season, and the Riversdale hounds were meeting at Blackthorn. Not a favourite fixture, by any means, Blackthorn being a great wood as big as a small forest, where it was easy to go astray, and which it was difficult to make a

fox quit. On the other hand, Blackthorn was a sure find, and when the hounds got away with one of the right sort the result was generally satisfactory to the fortunate few who happened to see him break cover or hear the halloes of those who did ; to the residue and remainder confusion and disappointment.

Nevertheless, there was a full muster, for the weather was propitious, and devotees of the sport were eager to put in all the hunting they could before Diana for a season bade the world farewell.

Among those present were Olive Lincoln and the two Princes, who, with their horses, had 'railed' from Peele to a station some three miles from Blackthorn. *En route* Edward had been very fortunate ; he sat opposite to Olive, and talked to her and feasted his eyes on her all the way ; for that had come to pass which he once expressed himself to his mother as fearing—he was smitten, and so deeply withal that the

material advantages which a marriage with Miss Lincoln would bring him faded into insignificance as compared with the fair girl herself. At the station he superintended the boxing of Olive's horse, helped her to mount, and rode with her to cover, Charlie pairing off with the second Miss Spankaway, one of a trio of red-haired, hard-riding sisters.

At the cover-side counsels were divided, even the knowing ones hesitating whither to betake themselves. Some tried to follow the hounds into the thick of the wood; others kept in the rides, or stole round to points where they thought it likely the fox would break; the majority, of whom were our friends, took post to windward of the wood.

While Edward, who had a weakness for bigwigs, was being introduced by the secretary to Sir Somebody Something, a distinguished stranger from a distance, and Lydia Spankaway was talking to Mrs. Rivers, Charlie exchanged signals with

Olive, and then turned his horse quietly into a contiguous ride. She followed, and presently came up with him.

'Do you think we are going in the right direction?' she asked. 'Have they found a fox?'

'I have not the remotest idea. I wanted to give Ned and Lydia Spankaway the slip and have a talk with you, dearest. Don't you think I care more for you than for all the foxes in the country?'

'I hope so. All the same, there is something in your tone—you speak as if you were not quite happy.'

'How can I be quite happy? Did not Ned monopolize you all the way, and the last time we were out you flirted with Teddy Spankaway all the time.'

'How horrid you are, Charlie!' returned Olive, with her prettiest pout. 'Didn't you promise not to be vexed if I pretended not to care for you, and let other men pay me little attentions?'

'I call them big attentions, and you flirt as if you liked it,' muttered the young fellow.

'Well, I do, just a little. It is great fun. Your brother was quite wild when I was flirting with your friend Teddy the other day, and I dearly like to tease Edward. He thinks so much of himself. All the same, I almost think I did him an injustice in saying that my fortune was the exclusive object of his affections. I begin to think he is half in love with me.'

'Of course he is; everybody is.'

'Not quite so bad as that, I hope, Charlie dear. You must not imagine that everybody is as infatuated as yourself. And don't be jealous and absurd. Rather give me credit for tact and fine management. Nobody either suspects us or talks about us; and you know that I love you. What would you have more?'

Charlie saw that it was time to climb down.

'You are quite right—you are always

right,' he said penitently. 'I am an ass, a dolt, and you are wise and clever. But I love you so dearly that I begrudge every smile that you give to another. It is one the less for me.'

'You avaricious wretch! Cannot you console yourself with Lydia Spankaway? She is always smiling on you.'

'Hang Lydia Spankaway! She is always smiling on everybody. Her life is a perpetual giggle.'

The words were hardly spoken, when the young woman in question and her brother came tumbling out of the wood a few yards ahead of them.

'Where are the hounds?' asked the brother.

'That is just the question I was going to ask you, Teddy,' said Charlie.

'We tried to follow them into the hollow and got bogged.'

'Of course.'

'By Jove! I believe I heard a hallo.

Come along, Lydia. Won't you come, Prince ?'

'No. We are just as well here, and if you ride to every semblance of a shout you hear, your horse will be used up before the fun begins.'

'It's a view hallo—I'll swear it's a view hallo !' exclaimed the youth excitedly. 'Come along, Lydia. If they have gone away I'll give a screech, and if they come this way, you do as much for me, there's a good fellow.'

And with that Mr. Spankaway and his sister went off at full gallop.

'Do you think they are gone away ?' inquired Olive anxiously.

'As likely as not.'

'Then why——'

'Why don't we ride after the Spankaways ? Because I would rather ride home with you, darling !'

'Ride home with me ? What ? Listen ! I am sure that is Teddy screeching.'

'Let him screech. I'd rather ride quietly home with you than have a galloping run of forty minutes without a check. It is almost our last chance. The season is as good as over, and I doubt whether we shall be able to contrive a *tête-à-tête* of more than a few minutes all summer. Now the days are so long the King's Path is not safe—too many people about.'

'But isn't it a very long way, and won't it seem strange?'

'Only fifteen miles, and our horses are fresh, and we can gruel them and get a cup of tea at the Beehive. And there is nothing strange in losing hounds in Blackthorn high woods. Half the field will be in the same fix; and having lost them, it will be better for us to go straight home than potter about here for the remainder of the day, or wait in the village for the 4.30 train.'

'I am not sure that it will be quite wise,' said Olive pensively. 'All the same, if it will give you pleasure——'

'Give me pleasure! Oh, Olive, if you only knew! This way,' and with that he turned his horse in the direction of Teddy Spankaway's last screech.

'You are going to look for the hounds, then?'

'We must find out what has become of them. They may be in the wood yet. It would never do to leave without having a proper tale to tell when we get home.'

Olive smiled. It pleased her to think that, impetuous though he was, her lover had not altogether lost sight of prudence.

As they went on they were joined by many others, and presently the master himself came up in a great heat and asked the question everybody else was asking, 'Where are the hounds?' and like everybody else getting no answer.

'I do believe they have slipped away, he said.

And so it proved. On reaching the confines of the wood they found there several

yokels and second horsemen, from whom they learnt that the hounds had gone away ten minutes previously, Quickly and some two score gentlemen with them, very fast, and, as it seemed, running towards Sandford.

'What a sell!' chorused twenty voices.

'I shall go on and try to nick in; they may check, or run a ring,' said the master, and off he went, followed by a dozen of the belated ones, whose number was continually increasing.

'Not a bit of use,' said another. 'Ten minutes' start and a fast thing. They will only hammer their horses' legs to pieces on the hard highroad. I shall chuck it up and go home.'

'I suppose we had better do the same,' observed Charlie to Olive, as though the idea were occurring to him for the first time. 'If we try to overtake them we shall only use up our horses to no purpose.'

'You think it would be a vain pursuit, then?'

'Decidedly.'

'Very well. Let us go home, then. Which is the way?'

Several of the others set off with them; but they soon parted company, and Charlie had Olive all to himself for the rest of the ride, and a delightful long-drawn-out ride it was, through green lanes and pleasant bridle-paths, past ancient halls nestling among trees, farmhouses with red roofs and high gables, and barns such as are not built now-adays — big enough for cathedrals — and quaintly picturesque churches, whose ivy-mantled towers looked down on the dust of twenty generations.

At the Beehive, an old timbered inn, which had been a house of entertainment since the dissolution of monasteries, the travellers halted to bait their horses and refresh themselves. Tea was served in a snug little parlour with black oak wainscoting and diamond-shaped window-panes, looking into a venerable garden; and as there

was nobody in the garden, and the lovers were sole occupants of the parlour, they were quite happy, forgetting for awhile everything but themselves and their love, and lingering perhaps longer than was altogether wise. Nevertheless they reached home an hour sooner than they would have done had they returned by rail.

'What will Edward say?' asked Olive, as they reined up at All Hallows lodge-gates.

'I do not see that he has a right to say anything. I am your duly appointed pilot, and I have taken you home many a time before.'

'The circumstances were very different, though. We have been alone nearly all day, and he will be vexed at being left to train home by himself—perhaps say something to mother which may reawaken her suspicions. Anyhow, for the next few weeks we shall need to be extremely circumspect, and I will be very gracious to Edward. No, don't come up to the house

with me. If mother thinks you are neglecting me, so much the better. Good-night, Charlie dear.'

'Good-night, darling. This has been the happiest day I ever had in my life.'

'I hope we may not have to pay a heavy price for it,' thought Olive as she trotted up the avenue; 'but something tells me that Edward will be very angry—and I distrust him more than I like to let Charlie know. Dear old Charlie! How strange it is that two brothers should be so different!'

CHAPTER XIII.

JEALOUS.

Edward did not miss the lovers until some time after they had stolen away. Then, after making several fruitless inquiries, he went to look for them. He might as well have looked for a needle in a haystack; but while he was seeking the lovers he found the hounds, and the hounds found a fox. Feeling sure that he was now on the right track, he rode to the first whip's view hallo, and was one of the first out of the wood; and having no doubt that he should presently encounter Charlie and Olive (who were generally in the first flight), he went boldly on. But the field being rather scattered and the country rather heavily

timbered, he looked for the fugitives in vain, and had to console himself with the reflection that he should find them when the hounds checked—or, at any rate, at the end of the run, which he devoutly hoped would not be long. It lasted a good hour, the latter part of it, however, being rather slow, and ended in the middle of a covert, where Reynard ran into a drain and could not be persuaded to come out and be killed.

Edward, who, thanks to easy fences and a line of gates, was well up, looked round, and when he saw nothing of those whom he sought, his first feeling was a sense of elation. He had beaten his brother for once. But when the last of the laggards appeared on the scene, and the said brother and the young lady were still invisible, he began to feel uneasy.

'Have you seen anything of my brother and Miss Lincoln?' he asked of Teddy Spankaway, who was standing at his horse's

head, devouring a ham sandwich and drinking whisky-and-water from an electro-plated flask.

'The last time I saw them was in Blackthorn Wood, and very thick they seemed.'

'Thick! What do you mean?'

'They were in close converse, and very near together—heads almost touching, in fact—and though I told them I had heard a hallo, and when I knew the hounds were running gave a screech which I am sure they must have heard, they did not come on. Anyhow, they are out of it, and I expect that is where they want to be. That brother of yours is a sly dog, Prince, and Miss Lincoln is a deuced nice girl.'

And then Mr. Spankaway, who was himself rather sweet on Olive, and jealous of Charlie, laughed maliciously and offered Edward his flask. Edward tried to look unconcerned, muttered something about the

possibility of anybody losing hounds in Blackthorn Wood, and asked whether they were going to draw again.

'Of course we are, as soon as Harden turns up. He has been thrown out, too—not often that happens. Do you know your horse has lost a shoe?'

'Confound it! so he has. Where is there a forge?'

'Down the road to the right, near the windmill.'

The loss of the shoe delayed Edward half an hour, and when he set his face towards Blackthorn, hounds and hunters were nowhere to be seen; but presently he met a groom with a lame horse, who was able to tell him that Mr. Harden had fallen in with the hounds, and that his brother and Miss Lincoln were gone home.

'But there is no train till 4.30?'

'I think they are hacking all the way, sir.'

'The deuce they are!' and Edward

Prince went on, looking as black as thunder and in a very evil frame of mind.

Teddy Spankaway's words had re-awakened the suspicion he had once entertained, that Olive and Charlie had a sneaking kindness for, and perhaps a secret understanding with, each other.

'It looks like a planned thing,' he thought. 'It looks as if they had stopped in the covert on purpose. Anybody may lose hounds in that horrid wood; but why did not they come on with Franklin, and why, oh why! have they gone home by road without waiting for me, or making an effort to find me? It is not fair, it is not right, it is scarcely courteous.'

Edward was furiously jealous; the idea of being supplanted by his brother, whom in his heart he rather despised, was gall and wormwood to him, and he had made so sure that Olive liked him and cared no more for Charlie than Charlie cared for her that the disappointment was doubly bitter.

He had been deceived, played with, made a 'spoon-handle of,' and he said in his anger that he would let 'those two' see that he could not be befooled with impunity.

But when he cooled down somewhat and considered the matter further, he perceived that he had really very little ground for complaint; the existence of a secret understanding between Olive and Charlie had still to be proved. Spankaway, a mere sporting man, who regarded coarse jokes as high wit, was quite capable of straining a point to provoke a laugh. He had no doubt grossly exaggerated, if not actually invented; and, after all, there was nothing very alarming in Charlie and Olive being left behind for once in a way, and hacking home instead of waiting for a train. In like circumstances he would probably have done the same.

Notwithstanding this commendable effort to weigh both sides of the question, Edward was suspicious still. Though the circum-

stances were consistent with either theory, the thoughts and memories which came unbidden to his mind fed the flame of his jealousy, and he felt furiously anxious to know the truth. But how was he to know it? He could not openly ask Charlie without risking a rebuff and showing his own hand. He was neither his brother's keeper nor Olive's guardian. Charlie had just as much right to fall in love with her as he had, and he would certainly refuse to disclose anything which might compromise her, or which he desired in his own interest or hers to keep secret.

After long cogitation Edward made up his mind to dissemble his jealousy and keep his suspicions to himself. Until he had evidence that Olive and Charlie were carrying on a clandestine courtship he would not say a word to anybody—even to his mother. But he would seek for evidence, leave no stone unturned to obtain it, and when he had obtained it, act. How, he could not as yet

decide—that would depend on circumstances; only he was fully resolved that Olive should be his, and not Charlie's. The mere thought that he might lose her angered him almost past bearing. He had known for some time that he loved Olive, but never until then had he realized the intensity of his passion, and how necessary to his happiness she was become.

Charlie, indeed! Charlie's partiality for Olive—if it existed—was mere calf love, the fugitive fancy of an overgrown boy, who took no thought for the morrow; his, the strong love of a mature man, who had formed definite views of life, and meant to get on. If the matter were fairly put to Olive, there could, he felt sure, be no question as to her choice. Meanwhile, the fair putting being neither feasible nor expedient, there was nothing for it but to wait, and, as Edward said to himself, everything comes to the man who knows how to wait—and watch.

His first question to the groom who met

him at Peele Station was whether his brother had returned.

'Yes, sir; he hacked.'

'He got home early, then?'

'Not very. About half-past five, I think. It is a longish way from Blackthorn.'

'Fifteen miles. They took five hours to do fifteen miles, and their horses quite fresh,' thought Edward. 'What could they be doing all the time?'

And the demon of jealousy gnawed harder at his heart than ever. But when he got home and met Charlie in the hall he smiled pleasantly.

'A nice fellow you are, to run away and leave me to come home alone!' quoth he.

'Nay, it was you who ran away and left us. When we got out of the covert you were *non est*, and you had been gone so long that there was no chance of overtaking you. So we just hacked home, Olive and I.'

'You did not stop anywhere, then?'

'Only at the Beehive to gruel. Had you a good run?'

'A regular clinker. A good sixty minutes, first twenty as fast as we could leg it, and lost the fox in a drain at Slasher's Mill.'

'And we were out of it! But make haste and get changed. The pater wants you in his room.'

'What's in the wind now?'

'A family council. You are required to make it complete, so hurry up.'

Edward, though particular about his person, and generally slow over his toilet, did hurry up, and, on entering his father's room some fifteen minutes later, found the other members of the family in deep consultation. The matter was this:

The firm of Lincoln, Lyman, and Jump (whose affairs were in Chancery) had made heavy advances to one of their correspondents in Trinidad, on the security of various properties there. The correspondent in

question having failed, and the amount involved being large, and the business complicated, it was considered necessary to send somebody out to protect the interests of the house and realize the hypothecated properties ; and in the opinion of the Vice-Chancellor no gentleman could so well perform this duty as Mr. Leonard Prince ; he was a lawyer, a man of business, and had all the facts at his fingers' ends. Would he accept the commission, and on what terms ?

'The letter came after you were gone this morning,' said Mr. Prince to Edward, 'and, as you see, it requires a prompt answer. Mother and Charlie are rather for it. They are pleased to think the trip would do me good. What is your opinion ?'

Edward was also rather for it. Like the others, he thought the trip would do his father good ; moreover, during his absence he would naturally take his father's place in the office, and represent him in the town, and the idea pleased Edward. But he was

not the man to answer an important question by simply saying ditto to somebody else.

'What is your opinion?' repeated Mr. Prince.

'What is my opinion?' said Edward, knitting his brows and looking wondrous wise. 'This is a very serious matter, and requires a good deal of consideration. Mother and Charlie think the trip would do you good. I hope they are right; but what is their authority? Those West India islands are not generally supposed to be the most healthy places in the world.'

'Mr. Lincoln has been several times to Trinidad, and I have heard him say that the island was healthy and the voyage there pleasant.'

'Then we may regard that point as settled. The next is, can you be spared?'

'That is rather for you to say. Charlie has been doing very well lately, and I don't see why you and he and Lillywhite should

not be able to do without me for three or four months, and the pay I get for going out would be all to the good.'

'Less the extra premium on your life policy.'

Mr. Prince's countenance fell. Something was always happening to remind him of that terrible skeleton. Only the week before Peploe and Pope had written to say that they doubted whether they should be able to pay any more interest.

'I had not thought of that,' he said gravely. 'It is not indisputable yet.'

'It does not become indisputable for two years. In the meantime you are limited to Europe and North America. But the company would give you a license.'

'Of course they would. But upon what terms? You had better go to town to-morrow and ascertain. If they make any charge at all it should be something quite nominal. As my policy permits me to cross the Atlantic, the mere voyage involves

no extra risk, and the trip out and home, and the change and that, can hardly fail to benefit my health.'

'That is a good point. I will urge it,' said Ned, making a mem. in his note-book. 'If this can be arranged you will go, of course.'

'I think so. It will be an agreeable trip and a new experience, and they cannot give me less than five hundred and my expenses.'

'Five hundred is not enough, father. Shall I arrange that for you also while I am in town?'

'By all means, Ned. You are a better hand at a bargain than I am, and will probably get more than I should dare to ask. And now, having finished our business, let us go in to dinner.'

The next morning Edward went to London, and justified his father's opinion of his business capacity by making two very satisfactory bargains. By persuading the

assurance company that the contemplated voyage could not fail to benefit his father's health, he obtained the license on very favourable terms, and by taking the opposite tack with the Chancery people—dwelling on the perils of ocean travelling and the manifold dangers of a tropical climate (especially for a man at his father's time of life) — he obtained a hundred and fifty pounds more than the sum which Mr. Prince had named, and with which he would have been content.

Edward called this diplomacy—his father would have called it sharp practice, if he had known the facts ; but Mr. Prince was too well satisfied with the result to be inquisitive about details, and the money would be very useful.

The license granted by the insurance company (in consideration of a payment of twenty pounds) was for a voyage to Trinidad and back per Royal mail steamer, and the perils incident thereto, and a residence in

the island not exceeding three months—unless Mr. Prince should be detained there longer than that period by circumstances beyond his control.

For a hundred and thirty pounds more the company would have anticipated the time by which the policy was to become indisputable and 'good for all the world.' But as this seemed to Edward like paying so much money for nothing, he elected for the conditional license, and plumed himself on having scored a great success. But it is possible to be too clever, and in the issue Edward discovered that the proverb about a penny saved being a penny gained is not of universal application.

CHAPTER XIV.

LILLYWHITE'S DEMAND.

Mr. Prince's main (though unconfessed) reason for desiring to go to the West Indies was that he might get away from the skeleton for a time. With three or four thousand miles of ocean rolling between them, it would (metaphorically) be out of sight, and, as he hoped, out of mind. The fresh scenes he should behold and the new and varied impressions he should receive must needs divert the current of his thoughts, and he would enjoy a short interlude of peace, which he sorely needed, for latterly the skeleton had been unpleasantly obtrusive.

After paying the agreed interest in full,

though intermittently, for three years, Peploe and Pope had ceased their remittances, and intimated pretty plainly that it was unlikely they would ever be resumed. This meant a loss of six hundred a year; and the premium on the triple life policy brought up to a thousand pounds per annum the cost of keeping the skeleton under lock and key. But for the profits arising out of the Lincoln lawsuit, the burden would have been almost more than Mr. Prince could bear without making such retrenchments as would seriously affect his position in the town. For Mrs. Lincoln's sake he wanted the suit to end; for his own, it were better for it to go on—a conflict of interests that sometimes rendered it difficult for him to advise his client with that singleness of purpose which for three generations had been the rule of the office.

Edward, on the other hand, was rather disposed, for financial reasons, to protract the suit, and father and son had occasionally

'words' on the subject. The young man had, moreover, an unpleasant way of referring to the skeleton as that 'terrible business,' and hinting that in using Mrs. Lincoln's trust-fund to square Peploe and Pope his father had committed a fatal mistake. This Mr. Prince knew only too well; but he did not like being told so. It was as bad as rubbing bay-salt into an open wound. Nor did he in his heart approve of his wife's project for making a match between Edward and Olive; there was something underhand about it. He had a great regard for Olive, and felt sure that Edward and she would not pull well together. But Dorothy had set her mind on it, and if he could not successfully oppose her alone, much less could he do so when she was supported by Edward, who was a host in himself, and to whom the disclosure of the secret had given additional power.

Oppressed by all these cares, and feeling as he had never felt before the weight of

years, there were times when Mr. Prince wished himself dead. His death would settle everything; the assurance money would make good his breach of trust, and though he could not leave his sons a fortune, he should leave them an excellent business and a name free from reproach. These fits of depression were, however, infrequent, and he was forgetting his worries in the work of preparing for the approaching voyage, and beginning to contemplate the future more hopefully, when an incident occurred that revived his fears, and gave him the most severe shock he had sustained since the discovery of Jack's defalcations.

Two or three days before his departure he was in his room, looking over papers, and making notes for Edward's guidance during his absence, when the door opened and in walked Lillywhite. In this there was nothing unusual, but the deliberation of the managing clerk's movements, and the

solemnity of his visage, bespoke the importance of his errand.

'What is it now, Lillywhite?' said Mr. Prince, looking up. 'Has our best client run away without paying his bill of costs, or does Mr. Trumpler want a new will making?'

Instead of greeting his employer's joke with a smile, Lillywhite looked more solemn than ever.

'It is not office business this time, Mr. Prince. It's touching a matter personal to our two selves that I want a word with you.'

'Can he want his salary raised?' thought Mr. Prince. 'All right, Lillywhite; if there is anything I can do for you, I am sure I shall be very happy——'

'You set sail on Friday?'

'God bless me! Is that what you had to say?' quoth Mr. Prince, with a laugh. 'Yes, I set sail on Friday.'

'I hope you will come back, sir.'

'Pon my word, Lillywhite! Of course I shall come back. Why not?'

'Well, there's a sight of water between this and the West Indies; and where there is water there is danger. I never liked it—either inside or out. I don't want to discourage you, sir, but I cannot help thinking that it is a very hazardous undertaking for a gentleman at your time of life. And as you may never come back, though I sincerely hope you will, I should like to have a proper understanding.'

'As to what? For heaven's sake, come to the point, Lillywhite! You know how busy I am.'

'My position in the office.'

'Your position will be what it has been—that of managing clerk.'

'Under Mr. Edward?'

'Of course. You surely don't suppose that he will be under you?'

'He might do worse. He has not all the sense in the world, though he evidently

thinks so; and his manner to me is often very discourteous—almost offensive, indeed; and if I am to be under him during your absence, he must promise to treat me with becoming respect; also, I should like a slight increase of salary.'

'Anything else?' asked Mr. Prince sarcastically. 'You had better open your mouth wide enough while you are about it.'

'Not at present; I think that will do till you come back.'

'Not at present! Gad! you speak as though you were surprised at your own moderation. You have been with me a long time—more than twenty years.'

'Twenty-two on the tenth of next month.'

'Twenty-two, then—and served me well and faithfully; and I have treated you handsomely, giving you my entire confidence, and letting you have pretty nearly your own way in everything. In point of fact, I have spoiled you. It is as Edward said the other

day—you cannot stand corn; you are getting above yourself.'

'Edward said that, did he? I am obliged to him,' interposed the managing clerk, with an angry shake of his portentous nose, which, after blushing violently, had become almost blue.

'You are getting above yourself,' repeated Mr. Prince, heedless of the interruption, 'and as your demands are unreasonable and cannot be complied with, I fear we shall have to part—unless you choose to withdraw them. Think about it, Lillywhite; I should be sorry for you to decide hastily.'

'I have thought about it already, and my mind is made up; but before you finally make up yours, sir, there is one observation I should like to offer. You say you have given me your entire confidence. So you have—with one exception—and a very important exception.'

'What is that, Lillywhite?'

'The matter of your son John and Peploe and Pope.'

Mr. Prince turned as pale as if the cupboard had opened of itself and the skeleton had walked into the room.

'My son John—Peploe and Pope! What do you mean?' he exclaimed, trying to keep his countenance.

'I guess you know, sir,' returned Lilly-white grimly. 'I can perhaps put two and two together, and likewise see as far into a stone wall as anybody else. When Peploe came here three or four years since I thought something was wrong—he would not come all the way from Liverpool for nothing—and when I heard that Mr. John had got into debt and run away I felt sure something was wrong. I took Peploe's measure. He would not have cared a button how much Mr. John got into debt, so long as it was not to him. So I put two and two together, and from certain things that happened at that time and afterwards I

came to the conclusion that you had sold out Mrs. Lincoln's——'

'Lillywhite, I did not expect this of you!' interrupted Mr. Prince in a voice of bitter reproach. 'You have been playing the spy —prying into affairs that do not concern you, and, I very much fear, opening my private letters.'

'No, sir! no, sir! no, sir!' thundered the clerk, emphasizing each denial with a resounding thump of his fist on the table. 'I never opened a private letter of yours in my life. I would scorn to stoop to any such rascality. I am curious, I know, but I am not a scoundrel. But those who run may read, Mr. Prince. The outward appearance of a letter, like the outward appearance of a man, often gives clue to what is inside. The way of it was this, sir: when that unfortunate affair took place, and I saw that you could not or would not trust me, I felt hurt, and I resolved to fathom the mystery —by strictly honourable means, of course.

Peploe comes unexpectedly, stays a long time, and leaves you much disturbed; the next day you go off and don't return for three or four days; you decline to sell out Mrs. Lincoln's stock and lend the money on mortgage as I proposed. Nevertheless, there comes a letter from the Bank of England, which, unless I am much mistaken, was an intimation that application had been made for power of attorney to sell out stock, and I knew, of course, that Mrs. Lincoln's was the only trust-money we had in Consols; also, before-time her dividends passed through my hands, whereas afterwards you took the management of the trust entirely into your own. From these and other circumstances, which I need not mention, I drew certain conclusions.'

'Ah! You drew certain conclusions. What were they? You may speak fully; but bear in mind, please, that inferences are not evidence, and I admit nothing whatever.'

'I did not suppose you would, sir—at

first. It is a safe rule not to admit anything. Well, my conclusions—or, if you like it better, my suspicions—amounted to this: that your son got into trouble about a bit of paper, or something of the kind, and to prevent him from being prosecuted you made up the deficiency by—shall we say borrowing?—the whole or the greater part of Mrs. Lincoln's trust-fund. When Mr. John appeared here a little while ago, disguised as a tramp, these suspicions became absolute certainty. People don't run away and return in disguise for nothing more serious than contracting debts which they are unable to pay.'

'Jack here! Jack in disguise!' exclaimed Mr. Prince, after a long stare of bewilderment and surprise. 'Preposterous! It is absurd—impossible! This is an invention of your own, Lillywhite—a wicked invention!'

'It is no invention, sir, though I judge by your manner that you were not aware

of the circumstance,' returned the clerk quietly; 'I saw Mr. John with my own eyes.'

'You did really, Lillywhite? You are sure you are not deceiving me?' said Mr. Prince in a husky voice, as he wiped away the sweat which stood in big beads on his forehead.

'I did, sir; and I am not the only one that saw him. One evening about the end of October, or the beginning of November—I have the exact date in my diary—I met a tramp in Church Lane, in whose appearance, though his clothes were ragged, and he had a patch over his left eye, there was something strangely familiar to me. All the same, I could not make him out, but I'm naturally of a curious turn, and as I never like to have an unsatisfied doubt on my mind, I just followed my young gentleman, which the growing darkness enabled me to do without attracting his attention. He took the road to Holmcroft, and when I saw

him enter your grounds the mystery was solved. I knew that the tramp was John Prince.'

Mr. Prince's face broke into a smile of relief. It was not as bad as he thought. Lillywhite was either trying to impose on him or had found a mare's-nest.

'What nonsense!' he said. 'How could you know anything of the sort? Not a day passes that half a dozen unrecognisable tramps don't come begging to Holmcroft.'

'Wait a minute, sir; I have not done yet. On the following night I happened to drop into the Blue Bear, and there met Turnbull, the leather-seller, who was just back from London. He went by parliamentary train the same morning, and he saw a man with a patch over his left eye, who got in at Peele and got out at London, for all the world like John Prince.'

'It was not John Prince. It could not be John Prince. Do you think that if he had been here and come to Holmcroft I

should not have known? You are mistaken, and Turnbull is a fool. And now let us come to the point. I have no time for more talk. You think you have found something out, and want paying for your silence. Mind, I don't admit you have found anything out—of importance, and if you were to say outside what you have been saying to me now I should either treat it with silent contempt or prosecute you for slander. But I detest scandal, and I don't want to have my family affairs discussed in every taproom in the town.

'So let me know, please, at how much you value your silence, which, allow me to remind you, it is your duty to observe in any circumstances. To divulge anything you may have learnt here would be——' 'a gross breach of trust,' Mr. Prince was going to say, but remembering that he had himself committed a still grosser offence of the same sort, and fearing a *tu quoque*, he stopped short.

'Oh, sir, you do me a great injustice,' protested Lillywhite, in a tone of injured innocence, which Mr. Prince thought was put on, but which may well have been sincere. 'You do me a great injustice. All that comes to my knowledge professionally I regard as sacred; but what I discover is surely my own property, in the sense that I may keep it secret or not at my pleasure. And I ask no price for my silence: merely such a modest increase of my salary as my long and faithful services deserve—say a hundred a year—and the assurance that during your absence Mr. Edward will treat me with ordinary courtesy and respect.'

'I engage that he shall do so. You shall also have the increase you ask for, but you will please to remember that if you do not observe the most absolute discretion we shall have to part. When Mr. Edward comes in be good enough to tell him I would like to speak to him.'

The clerk, who was evidently rather taken

aback by the firmness of his principal's manner, rose from his chair, bowed, and retired.

'D—— Mr. Edward!' he muttered when he was outside. 'I'll be even with that jackanapes one of these days. The governor put a better face on it towards the last than I expected. But he could not deny it; he could not deny it. I might have done better. However, a hundred a year isn't to be sneezed at, and I reckon I can have more for the asking. But not yet—more haste less speed. Slow and sure is a good horse.'

'My God, what a life!' murmured Mr. Prince, leaning his head on his hands. 'Why did I let Dorothy overpersuade me? Why didn't I have the courage of my opinions, and face the thing? It would have been forgotten by this time. . . . How I have been deceived! And Lillywhite! He professes to be hurt because I did not give him my confidence. That would not have

mended matters at all. I should be more in his power than I am now, and I fancy he cares quite as much for power as money. If he had asked for two hundred I should have given it.'

Presently Edward came in. His father told him what had happened.

'Dear me! dear me!' he exclaimed. 'That terrible business again! What will be the end of it?'

'That is a question I often ask myself. I often think it will be the end of me, and that would perhaps be the best of all. The insurance money would put everything straight. One man can steal a horse, while another may not look over a gate. It seems hard that I should be harassed in this way for a single dereliction of duty—the only one, as I can truly say, which I ever committed.'

'It was worse than a dereliction of duty, father. It was a blunder. Had you borrowed the money openly it would have been

even worse. You might have been called upon to repay it, whereas you are now practically your own creditor. I am rather afraid, though, it was another blunder giving in to Lillywhite. He knows nothing; it is all surmise. In your place I should have set him at defiance.'

'No, no, Ned; that would not do at all. If I did that I should make an enemy of him at once. He would talk. Think what a fine handle such a rumour would be for the Radicals. Mrs. Lincoln would be sure to hear of it, and though she should regard it as a base calumny, she might propose to lessen my responsibility by appointing another trustee; and a trustee in my position should be above suspicion. . . . Do you know, I think Lillywhite really believed that the tramp he saw going to Holmcroft was Jack.'

'Very likely. Nothing is more easy than to confound one person with another—especially after dark. The leather-seller's

story also belongs to the category of illusions. You may depend upon it that Jack is thousands of miles away from Peele.'

'I hope he is. All the same — poor Jack!' And the father's eyes filled with tears.

Edward had very promptly decided to treat Lillywhite's statement as illusory, partly out of a commendable desire not to add to his father's anxieties on the eve of his departure; mainly because his father would be sure to tell his mother, and he feared her reproaches for keeping her in ignorance of the scapegrace's return and sending him away without giving her an opportunity of seeing him.

When Edward left his father's room he took Lillywhite aside.

'My father has told me what passed between you a little while ago,' he said. 'You want to be treated with more courtesy, it seems. Well, I will treat you with more courtesy. Not because I am afraid of you,

mind; merely because of my father's promise. But if I had been in his place I should have promised nothing; I should have told you to do your worst.'

'Then you would have done a very bad thing, sir. Your father is a wiser man than you are, though I dare say you don't think so.'

Edward certainly did not think so. He looked on his father as old-fashioned, and lacking in judgment and resolution, and felt quite sure that he could have managed things a great deal better.

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